

The 'Two Dispensations'

Ellet J. Waggoner

Christ is the “Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8, R.V). “We are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:19, 20).

Ever since the foundation of the world, men have had “redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14). It is through “faith in His blood,” that righteousness is declared (Rom. 3:21, 25). Now “by faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Heb. 11:4). **So we see that “the blood of His cross” was available for righteousness and peace as soon as there was sin in the world. He is the propitiation “for the sins of the whole world,” not merely for a certain age of the world.**

Two dispensations have run parallel from the fall.

But as surely as Christ was slain from the foundation of the world, He was raised from the dead from the foundation of the world; for He saves men by His life. Therefore **the 'Christian dispensation' began for man as soon, at least, as the fall. There are indeed, two dispensations, a dispensation of sin and death, and a dispensation of righteousness and life, but these two dispensations have run parallel from the fall.** God deals with men as individuals, and not as nations, nor according to the century in which they live. No matter what the period of the world's history, a man can at any time pass from the old dispensation into the new. It is when men know Christ after the Spirit, that “old things are passed away,” and “all things are become new;” but Moses “endured, as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27), and therefore Moses was in the new dispensation.

In 2 Corinthians 3:5-18 we have this matter of the two dispensations clearly set forth. We will quote it from Dr. Young's Literal Translation: —

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who also made us sufficient to be ministrants of a new covenant, not of letter but of Spirit, for the letter doth kill, and the Spirit doth make alive. And if the ministration of the death, in letters engraved in stones, came in glory, so that the sons of Israel were not able to look steadfastly to the face of Moses, because of the glory of His face, which was being made useless was passing away, how shall the ministration of the Spirit not be more in glory? For if the ministration of the condemnation is glory, much more doth the ministration of the righteousness abound in glory; for also even that which hath been glorious, hath not been glorious in this respect, because of the superior glory; for if that which is being made useless is through glory, much more that which is remaining is in glory. Having then such hope, we use much freedom of speech, and are

not as Moses, who was putting a vail upon his own face, for the sons of Israel not steadfastly to look to the end of that which is being made useless was as passing away; but their minds were hardened, for unto this day the same vail at the reading of the old covenant doth remain unwithdrawn, —which in Christ is being made useless which vail is done away in Christ, —but till today, when Moses is read, a vail upon their heart doth lie, and whenever they may turn to the Lord, the vail is taken away. And the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; and we all with unvailed face, the glory of the Lord beholding in a mirror, to the same image are being transformed, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

The reference here is to the circumstances attending the giving and receiving of the law, from Sinai. Read Exodus 34:29-35, and you will see that when Moses came down from the mount, where he had been talking with God, his face shone. Although he did not know that his face shone, the children of Israel could not look upon its dazzling brightness. So while he talked with them, he put a vail upon his face, but he took it off when he went into the presence of the Lord. While the people could not look upon the reflected glory of God, in the face of Moses, he could go with unvailed face into the presence of God Himself. And there were others who did the same, for we read: —

“Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in His clearness. And upon the nobles of Israel He laid not His hand; and they saw God, and did eat and drink” (Ex. 24:9, 11).

The Spirit gives the perfect righteousness of the law of God, which is simply His life.

Let us now summarize the above points.

1. Life comes from the Spirit alone. But “we know that the law is spiritual” (Rom. 7:14). He, who has the Spirit, has the righteousness of the law (Rom. 8:4); it is only when the Spirit is rejected, that the law works wrath, for without the Spirit the law is transgressed.

2. The glory of God is the righteousness of God. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Therefore **to be partakers of the glory of God is to be freed from sin. But freedom from sin is true obedience to the law.** It is the Spirit that changes men from glory to glory, into the perfect image of God. So again we see that **it is the Spirit that gives the perfect righteousness of the law of God, which is simply His life.**

3. That Spirit was given to men from the beginning. It was striving with men before the flood, to bring them into the way of righteousness (Gen. 6:3). The Spirit was with the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai: “Thou gave also Thy good Spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not Thy manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst” (Neh. 9:20).

4. The law merely upon tables of stone or written in a book can work only wrath and death. The reason is that in such a case it is only the statement of righteousness, and **no man can be saved by a mere statement of what his duty is. The law on stones, or in a book, simply tells us what to do, but gives us no power to do it.** Therefore the giving of the mere written words of the law to any people is simply ministering death to them. The thunders and lightnings and the earthquake at the giving of the law, and the fact that no one could touch the mount without dying, showed that men cannot approach the law to get righteousness from it of themselves. **He who takes the law as a simple statement of duty that he of himself must perform will find only death in it.**

5. But there was the ministration of righteousness at Sinai, as well as the ministration of death. The whole thing was designed for righteousness, and all would have received the righteousness of the law, through Christ, if all had believed as Moses did. “The law entered that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin had reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20, 21). Then no matter how much the law showed men to be sinners, and that the wages of sin is death, there was grace abounding to cleanse from all sin, by the life of Christ.

The glory of Calvary was shining at Sinai, as clearly as it shines now.

6. This is shown also by the fact that Moses went into the immediate presence of the glory of the Lord with unvailed face, although the people could not look upon the reflected glory in his face because their minds were blinded. That veil over the face of Moses, stood for the veil of unbelief over their hearts. **When a man shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away,** even as it was from the face of Moses, who, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, was changed into the same image from glory to glory.

That glory was the glory of the Gospel, for, continuing the narrative, we read: “But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:3, 4). The minds of the people were blinded, and so the light could not shine in; but the light was there, ready to shine in, for the mind of Moses was not blinded, and the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shone in his face, transforming him. **The law and the Gospel were united at Sinai, as everywhere else. The glory of Calvary was shining at Sinai, as clearly as it shines now.** Those who received it by faith had righteousness and life; those whose unbelief refused to see it, remained in sin and death. That, which is a savor of life to some, is a savor of death to others.

What then? Just this, that as the law at Sinai was “in the hands of a Mediator,” even the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Mediator, it was to teach all men that the law just as spoken there, is what Christ, through the medium of His life, puts ... **Christ dwells in the believing heart, and ministers the law as life, for His life is the law.** And so in the “new dispensation,” the Sabbath—the seventh day—is kept by men. And it is only in the new covenant or dispensation that the Sabbath of the Lord can be kept;

**for the righteousness of the law is fulfilled only in those in whom Christ dwells.
The old dispensation is self, but the new dispensation is Christ.**

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