

Acts 28:28, A Dispensational Boundary Line

Otis Sellers (1901-1992)

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A
Dispensational
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Line
by
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A dispensation or administration is a way or method of dealing. An administration of God is God's manner, scheme, plan or system of dealing with the world or with His own people in the world. (3)

The believer who accepts God's truth and seeks to walk and live in harmony with it will find himself more and more out of harmony with "organized Christianity." (5)

Any man is a dispensationalist who trusts in the blood of Jesus Christ rather than bringing to God an animal sacrifice. Anybody who admits that certain practices were the divine will at one time but are not the divine will now is a dispensationalist. (5)

The [Bible] readers cannot fail to see that the will of God for His people is not the same at all times. This being true, if we would stand perfect in the will of God, it becomes our solemn duty to know God's will for the present time. (6)

Simple logic will convince anyone that the two truths set forth in the following passages are contradictory:

"Every man child among you shall be circumcised." (Genesis 17:10)

"If ye be circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." (Galatians 5:2)

Acts 28:28

It is my earnest conviction that the most radical, revolutionary and far-reaching administrative change in the Word of God took place when Paul, as God's ambassador, spoke the words recorded for our learning by the Spirit of God in Acts 28:28.

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."

Here we have a new revelation from God, a message which declares that a radical change is being made; therefore, here we most positively find a change in dispensation or administration.

This declaration suspended the great tribulation, the second-coming of Christ and the millennial kingdom – events which were "at hand" during the period of time covered by the Gospels and the Acts. (7)

Isaiah's prophecy

Consider Isaiah 6:9-10: *"And He said, Go and tell this people: Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed."* (NASB by Bob's choice)

And then in Matthew 13:13-15 we read: *"And filled up in them is the prophecy of Isaiah, that is saying, 'In hearing, you will be hearing, and may by no means be understanding, and observing, you will be observing and may by no means be perceiving. For stoutened is the heart of this people, and with their ears heavily they hear, and with their eyes they squint, lest at some time they may be perceiving with their eyes, and with their ears should be hearing, and with their heart may be understanding, and should be turning about, and I shall be healing them.'" (CV by Bob's choice)*

And in John 12:37-40: *"Yet after His having done so many signs in front of them, they believed not in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet, which he said, may be being fulfilled, 'Lord, who believes our tidings? And the arm of the Lord, to whom was it revealed?' Therefore they could*

not believe, seeing that Isaiah said again that He has blinded their eyes and callouses their heart, lest they may be perceiving with their eyes, and should be apprehending with their heart, and may be turning about, and I shall be healing them.” (CV by Bob’s choice)

And then in Acts 28:25-27 we read again these *prefatory* words from Paul: *“Well spake the Holy Ghost by Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, ‘Hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive; For the heart of the people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”* (KJV)

These words were but a preface!

These words are the appropriate preface to the declaration that brought about the great dispensational change at Acts 28:28. *They had nothing to do with the change.* These words brought upon the nation of Israel a sentence of judicial blindness, judicial deafness, and judicial hardness of heart; but they declare no change in the administration of God that had prevailed since the day of Pentecost. (9)

The judgment that came upon Israel at the close of the Acts period, came because they once too often rejected the works and words of Jehovah. (10)

A new thing!

Following these words [Acts 28:25-27] he added the great declaration that brought about the dispensational or administrative change: *“Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”* (Acts 28:28)

These words – not the words that prefaced them – brought about the great dispensational change. This is the first time that the salvation of God had been sent to the Gentiles. (10)

When “the salvation of God” was sent to the Gentiles, Israel lost everything until that day when His salvation returns to them. (11)

It had always been “To the Jew first!”

In Acts 13:46 Paul declared in Pisidian Antioch after the Jews rejected his message: *“It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”*

Having fulfilled his obligation to preach the gospel “to the Jew first” in Pisidian Antioch, Paul was free to turn to the Gentiles in that place. Nevertheless, the gospel was still to the Jew first, so in the next chapter they are seen at work in the synagogues.

In Corinth Paul’s message was violently rejected, causing him to say, *“Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.”* (Acts 18:6)

So, in these cities Paul did most certainly turn to the Gentiles. But unless it can be proven that Paul and his message are identical with “the salvation of God,” then what happened in Antioch and Corinth is not the same as that which occurred in Rome. It was the salvation of God that was sent to the Gentiles at Acts 28:28, not Paul with a message. (11)

The Salvation of God

The majority who read of the salvation of God being sent to the Gentiles will take this to mean nothing more than the opportunity to be saved being offered to the Gentiles. When we turn to the Word of God to find how He used the word salvation, we will discover how incomplete, immature, and false these fleshly concepts are.

Salvation is the name or descriptive title of a person, and that person is the Jehovah of the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ in the New. The Salvation of God is a person, not a thing.

If we should ask why men are called doctor, soldier, sailor, carpenter, or governor, the answer is obvious. It is because of work they do, services they perform, or offices they hold. And this is why Jesus Christ is called the Salvation of God. It is because of an office He holds and a work He does.

One of the most important truths in the Word of God, a truth that is seldom fully comprehended, is that God the Father is the source of all things, and that God the Son is the channel through whom these things flow (see 1 Corinthians 8:6). (13)

We see God, the source of all, in James 1:17. We see Jesus Christ, the channel of all, in 1 Timothy 2:5.

An examination of all occurrences would show that the word is used at times to set forth the *blessing* rather than the *Blessor*; nevertheless, the term the Salvation of God as applied to Jehovah-Jesus is a descriptive title bestowed upon Him, because of the place He fills as the divine channel through which every blessing of God flows. (14)

Throughout the Old Testament, the Gospels, and Acts through 28:27 – God’s Salvation, His channel of blessing, was with and among Israel in a distinctive manner not granted to other nations. Israel’s lack of faith (Romans 9:32) may have greatly hindered the outflow of God’s blessings from His channel; nevertheless, it was with and among them.

God had placed His Salvation among Israel for the avowed purpose of blessing them, then blessing all other nations through them. (17)

[Some] will readily agree that the things set forth above were true before the birth of Christ, but will insist that they were no longer true after His advent into the world. Many hold the figment that His ministry was to the whole world without distinction. They ignore the great truth that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers (Romans 15:8). The channel of blessing was directed only toward Israel.

When the twelve disciples were instructed and sent forth they were commanded by the Lord to restrict their ministry to the people of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6).

This is also made clear in His dealings with the Syrophenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30). He says clearly in Matthew 15:24, *“I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* There was a divine limitation upon His ministry. (19)

He had been sent solely to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and after His resurrection He sent the disciples to these same lost sheep.

The book of Acts can be divided into two sections. The first nine chapters cover a time when the gospel was proclaimed to the Jews only. Even those believers who were scattered abroad as a result of the persecution that broke out after the stoning of Stephen, travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch preaching the word to none but until Jews only (Acts 11:19).

At Acts 10 a change within the dispensation took place. The Lord altered the instructions He had given in John 20:21 and Peter was sent to one Gentile family, the house of Cornelius. This did not change in the least the fact that the Salvation of God was still among Israel, for God used a Jewish vessel to carry the water of life to a Gentile. This was in complete harmony with the avowed purpose of God which He declared when He first placed His Salvation among Israel. *“In thee shall all the nations (Gentiles) of the earth be blessed”* was His declaration to Abraham’s seed. From Acts 10 Israel no longer had a monopoly on the gospel message, but they did have an absolute priority. *It was no longer to the Jew only, but it was to the Jew first* (see Romans 1:16).

When Paul began his active ministry among the Gentiles, he recognized this absolute priority on every occasion. And every time the Gentiles heard the gospel it came to them through a Jew

that believed. In the 33 years of the Acts period, no Gentile was ever used by God in any manner in the performance of any service. No Gentile ever preached to anyone, ever baptized anyone, ever laid hands on anyone, or performed any other divine service.

The Israelite could be a channel leading from the main channel, but the Gentile could be nothing more than a recipient. Furthermore, there was only one small company of men who were engaged in ministering to the Gentiles.

Paul had to proclaim the message to Israel first, and only after they rejected it could he turn to the Gentiles. (21)

Romans 15:8 says that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the fathers. In Romans 15:16 Paul says he was performing a priestly ministry in relationship to the Gentiles. As a Jew that believed, he could do this for the Gentile, but no Gentile could do it for a Jew or for another Gentile. (22)

Acts 28:28

The blindness of Israel became more complete as the Acts period ran its course. Everywhere the messengers went, the results were the same. Some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not. The purposes of God for Israel could not be worked out through individual believers. It had to be a national repentance. The promises could not be fulfilled to “some” that believed, for to Abraham and his *seed* were the promises made.

Paul’s words in Acts 28:26-27 did not impose blindness upon Israel. His words declared that their blindness had reached its climax. They had closed their own eyes, dulled their own ears, and hardened their own hearts. This brought upon them a divine pronouncement concerning their condition.

Their rejection of God’s gracious ministry to them caused God to declare through Paul: *“Be it known, therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”* (Acts 28:28)

Upon the final and decisive rejection of the testimony in Rome, a thing happened that had never been predicted, prophesied, or suggested. The Salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles. Not once in all Scripture was there even a threat that such a thing would take place.

At Acts 28:28 the channel was removed from Israel and sent to the Gentiles. This is the Secret which is now manifest. Christ (the Salvation of God) is now with and among the Gentiles. This gives us the right to expect the glory. We who now believe will never have a subordinate place in Israel’s kingdom.

All this sums up into three great truths.

1. Jehovah, the Salvation of God, with and among Israel (Jeremiah 14:8).
2. The Salvation of God sent to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28).
3. Christ, the Salvation of God, with and among the Gentiles (Colossians 1:27).

Acts 28:28 is a dispensational boundary line. It marks the most radical, the most revolutionary, and the most far-reaching change in the Word of God. (24)

THE SECRET

The secret (mystery) in Colossians 1:26 is the truth “Christ among you Gentiles.” God would now make known to His saints how vast a wealth of glory is contained in this truth – a truth which had been hid from ages and from generations but has now been revealed to His saints. This is THE SECRET, and all other truths revealed in Ephesians and Colossians were made possible because the Salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles and is now among us. (33)

Has the reader ever considered the frightful iniquity that is dormant in the hearts of men, but which now and then stirs itself and results in some terrible crime? Has he ever considered what a holocaust it would be if all restraint were removed and the latent iniquity that is in men’s hearts should manifest itself in a carnival of murder, rape, and pillage? Does he realize that the Gentile world has been restrained in its iniquity and has changed little since Paul described it in Romans 1 and 3? And does he know that the reason why – that while iniquity has ever sought to engulf the Gentile world but has not succeeded is because that at Acts 28:28 the Salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles? As long as Christ is among the Gentiles, the saint can live with a measure of safety in this vile world. (33)

Only in Paul’s writings

*** The following are excerpts from a short companion volume by Otis Sellers entitled “The Dispensation of the Grace of God. ***

Before Acts 28:28 was spoken “the salvation of God” was with and among Israel. After it was spoken “the salvation of God” is with and among the Gentiles.

During the period of time that the salvation of God is with and among the Gentiles, the dispensation or administration is that of the grace of God. Grace is the supreme, the absolute, the dominating principle that characterizes all of God’s dealings with the world today.

The greatest truth (Acts 28:28) is not even suggested by any other writer but Paul. The letters of Peter, James and John will be searched in vain for even the least hint that the salvation of God has been sent, or was to be sent, to the Gentiles.

Paul emphatically declares that in other ages it was not made known unto the sons of men (Ephesians 3:5), states that from the beginning of the world it had been hid in God (Ephesians 3:9), and clinches this by saying that it had been hid from ages and from generations (Colossians 1:26).

These great truths cannot possibly be found in the epistles Paul wrote before the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles. These epistles are 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans. (5)

Every one of these epistles bear the stamp of the salvation of God being with and among Israel. That they do not contain any of the truth that was a secret hid in God is seen in Paul’s great message recorded in Acts 26:22-23. These epistles were written and circulated before he spoke these words: *“I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, SAYING NONE OTHER THINGS THAN THOSE WHICH THE PROPHETS AND MOSES DID SAY SHOULD COME; that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.”* (6)

Grace

Grace is the unlimited love of God in expression. In the New Testament, God’s love toward sinners is always called grace. Grace is God’s love and favor to the undeserving, Grace is pure uncompensated kindness and favor. It is God’s love to His creatures who do not deserve His love. (8)

God’s present administration is not one of justice or judgment. It is one of grace. (9)

Grace in the Pentecostal Administration

The Pentecostal dispensation closed with an act of judgment. God’s final act toward Israel was to pronounce upon them a sentence of judicial blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart (Acts 28:26-27). His first act in the new dispensation was one of the greatest acts of grace recorded in the Word of God. To a people who were unthankful, proud, and idolatrous; to a people who had changed the truth of God into a lie; to a people who were filled with unrighteousness,

fornication, wickedness, covetousness, murder, and hate; to these people, the Gentiles, God performed His greatest act of grace in sending His salvation to them. (10)

The gospel of the grace of God was proclaimed throughout the greater part of the Acts period, but that period was no dispensation of grace. During that period grace was the sole means of forgiveness, redemption, and justification, but it was not an administration of grace. Pure grace can make no such distinctions as set forth in Romans 1:16 – “... *TO THE JEW FIRST* ...”

And Romans 11:21-22 – “... *on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also will be cut off.*” (12)

As for now ...

All judicial and punitive action against human sin is in abeyance, deferred until the dispensation of grace is over and the dispensation of judgment begins. (13)

Grace and Faith

Romans 4:16 speaks of the justification of the ungodly. This is declared to be an act of grace on the part of God. However, this grace operated through faith; therefore it is declared: “*Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace.*” It must be carefully noted that this statement deals with one matter only – the justification of the ungodly. (15)

Word of God alone

Grace can operate in the individual only through faith. Faith does not come from seeing miracles or experiencing wonders. Faith comes only by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. This is why we are shut up to the Word of God alone. (17)

Prayer (20)

[What follows is a most excellent description of prayer in our current age/dispensation.]

It is in Philippians 4:6-7 that we find a new basis of prayer which is in harmony with the dispensation of the grace of God.

“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

The basis of prayer set forth here makes everything about which there might be the least anxiety a legitimate subject for prayer. Our requests may concern physical needs, such as bodily healing; they may concern material needs, such as food and clothing; or they may concern spiritual needs, such as guidance, wisdom, or the salvation of others. By means of prayer and supplication, we are to make our requests known to God.

In the dispensation of grace prayer must be as if we were going to the storehouse with a requisition for supplies. We cannot make demands upon God ... or call on Him to fulfill His promises. But we can in prayer make our requests known unto Him.

There is no promise that our requests will be granted. Neither does it say that if two or three agree upon any request it shall be given to them. It teaches us to leave it all in His hands, confident that He will do that which is for our highest good. If we do this we will enter into His peace.

Sir Robert Anderson states: “The prayer of the Christian dispensation, that is, of the life of faith, is to make known our requests to God, and to be at peace. Should we not be content to say, after telling Him all, ‘now you know my feelings and my wishes, and I leave the case entirely in your hands.’ And this is just what God invites.”

There will be no answers of such nature as will impel man to believe in prayer. At the present time God is still answering prayer as fully as He has ever done. Nevertheless, all answers are of such nature that in the end the only positive proof we will have for believing that God answers prayer will be that testimony in the Word of God which we have read and believed.

In the Acts period, part of the proof that God heard and answered prayer could be found in the answer itself. Today, God’s manner of granting our request is of such a nature that no proof that God answers prayer can be found in the answer; therefore, faith in prayer can have no source but the Word of God.

“Sufficient for you is My grace.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

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This short book provides the best explanation I have seen as to why Acts 28:28 represents a change in dispensation – how God is dealing with mankind. I have shared my notes/excerpts, though I would highly recommend the reader find a copy of this book and read it in total.

Note: You can purchase this book at StudyShelf.com / Authors / Sellers, Otis

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