



January 10, 2010

The Ages Of God

The Bible reveals many things and some of them are not done directly. Sometimes we have to pay attention to how something is done and under what circumstances it occurs to understand the greater context or meaning. Patterns also emerge as we scrutinize the way in which things are done or happen. One that thing that may be confusing when one reads the scriptures is the apparent changes that seem to appear without any real explanation as to why or how they are coming about. Several years ago I wrote an article about a book which explored the “disappearance” of God from the scriptures. This was based on the observation that in the beginning of the biblical narrative, God is speaking to mankind directly but as time goes on, the Lord fades into the background until he seems to vanish entirely. I thought the realization that the author had come to was to be complimented (very few realize that this occurs in the scriptures) the later interpretation of this was not correct in regard to the greater context of the scriptures. The narrative does change from beginning to end. There is a shift and there is a reason for it. In the next few articles we will look at these changes and will also explore why they occurred and what they mean. We will find that God has changed his methods over time but we will also demonstrate that the character of God has never changed. Both Christ and God share this attribute as the writer of Hebrews points out. **“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Heb 13.8)**. We can conclude that God shares this nature and is of the same character based on the descriptions and statements earlier in the book. Speaking of Christ, the writer states, **“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high...” (Heb 1.3)**. The phrase “express image” points to an exact copy as in the manner in which a coin is copied and then impressions used to make new coins. The point is that Christ and God share the same nature and have the same integrity. The methods and means through which they act change in keeping with the development of a plan that eventually offers salvation to mankind. The plan that God enacted and brought to it’s fulfillment is the story of the Bible. As we read it is challenging to get a sense of the whole picture. Those who fail to grasp the central theme of the Bible in its context will not understand the nature of how God deals with mankind today. There are changes and these are significant. The changes affect the way in which we interpret scripture and the manner in which we apply the knowledge that we have to life. This directly has an impact on doctrine and practice. A failure to understand the fundamental concepts that the scriptures present is to miss the real meaning of the Bible and the story it tells. Some of the greatest and most renowned names in theology over the centuries have failed to grasp some simple truths about the word of God and that failure led to the religious confusion that we have today. The door was opened to any and all opinions that sought to revise the teachings and practice of many groups, sometimes spawning new religious entities. The Lord’s church however is founded on the word of God and those who desire to be New Testament Christians acknowledge the necessity of adhering to the content and doctrine of God as revealed. We will look at the principal ages that God has told us about over the next few weeks and will examine their relative impact on life today. We refer to these periods as dispensations, periods characterized by a particular way in which God dealt with mankind. As these change the methods and means of worship also change but point to something greater that is to come. Understanding these and the relevance to our lives today will help deepen our understanding of the scriptures and provide us with the incentive for being more diligent in keeping them.

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