



**COVENANT**

**OR**

**DISPENSATIONAL**  
**TEACHING**  
**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?**  
**WHICH IS CORRECT?**  
**DOES IT REALLY MATTER?**

# PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

**"A systematic interpretation of universal history in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward ultimate meaning."**

**"Karl Lowith, *Meaning In History*, 1949**

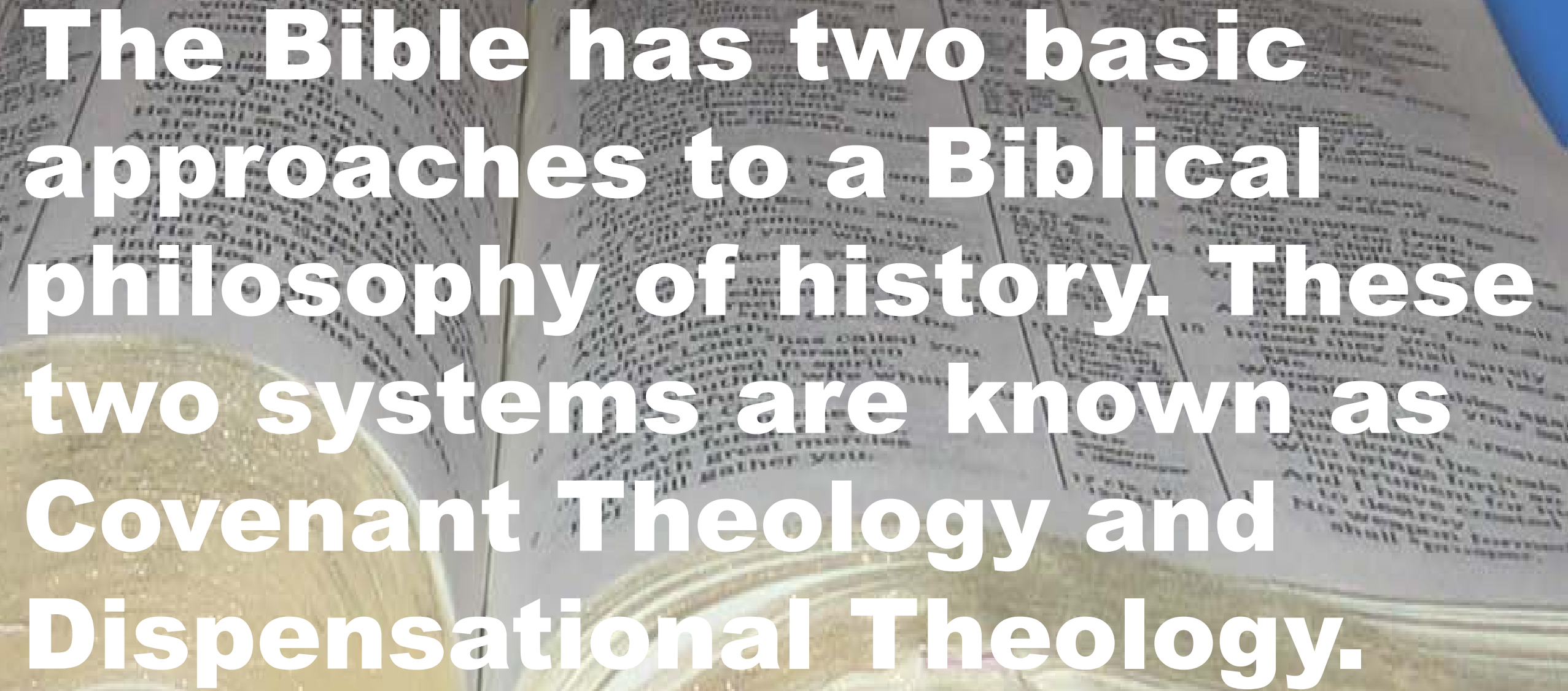


**According to this definition a philosophy of history has:**

**1) A systematic interpretation of history that covers the whole scope of history from beginning to end.**

**2) Has a unifying principle which ties together and makes sense of events, distinctions, and successions.**

**3) It assigns ultimate meaning to history.**

An open Bible is shown from a top-down perspective, with its pages spread wide. The text on the pages is visible but slightly blurred. Overlaid on the center of the Bible is a large, bold, white text block. The text reads: "The Bible has two basic approaches to a Biblical philosophy of history. These two systems are known as Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology." The background of the Bible is a mix of light and dark tones, with some pages appearing more yellowed than others.

**The Bible has two basic approaches to a Biblical philosophy of history. These two systems are known as Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology.**

# COVENANT THEOLOGY

**" . . . a system of theology which attempts to develop the Biblical philosophy of history on the basis of two or three covenants."**

Renald Showers, There Really Is A Difference, page 7

**"...a system of theology based upon the two covenants of works and grace as governing categories for the understanding of the entire Bible."** Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, page 177





**The third covenant that is accepted by some is the covenant of redemption.**

**Covenant Theology began to be developed in the 16th and 17th centuries.**

**The terms "covenant of works" and "covenant of grace" and "covenant of redemption" are not found in the Bible. The concepts may be there but the terms are not.**

**Most Covenant theologians hold to the three covenant view.**

# **COVENANT OF WORKS**

**Established between the triune God and Adam sometime between the creation and fall of man. God required "implicit and perfect obedience" of Adam. As representative head of the human race if Adam were to obey he and his descendants would have eternal life. If he disobeyed, he and his descendants, would be penalized with death - physical, spiritual, and eternal.**

**Some Scriptural proofs given for this by Covenant theologians are Deuteronomy 6:5, 10-12ff.; 30:15-20; Psalm 1; Romans 2:7-9.**

# COVENANT OF GRACE

**God established the Covenant of Grace because Adam broke the Covenant of Works. It is defined, according to Berkhof, as "that gracious agreement between the offended God, and the offending but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience."**

**God is the first party of the Covenant. There is disagreement as to who the second party is. Some say it is the sinner; others say it is the elect sinner; others say it is believers and their seed. Ultimately this Covenant would then include some who are never regenerated.**



**Some Scriptural proofs given for this Covenant are Genesis 3:15; Genesis 15:5; John 17; Isaiah 53:10-11; John 10:18; Luke 2:29.**

## **Hermeneutics (Principles of Interpretation) of Covenant Theology**

- 1) The historical-grammatical method is used**
- 2) When it comes to prophecy the method used is one of allegorical or spiritualizing**

**At least two problems thus occur:**

**1) As a result of the Covenant of Grace idea the Old Testament is interpreted by the New Testament. What ends up happening is that this principle is used to impose the New Testament on the Old Testament. This is seen in the doctrine of the church and salvation through faith in Christ.**

**2) As a result of this forced categorization Covenant**

**THEOLOGY FALLS SHORT IN A NUMBER OF AREAS AND IS A NON-BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND SHOULD BE REJECTED.**

# **DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY**

**A system of theology which attempts to develop the Bible's philosophy of history on the basis of the sovereign rule of God. It represents the whole of Scripture and history as being covered by several dispensations of God's rule.**

**Although dispensations were recognized as early as the 2nd century in church history it was not developed until the late 17th century.**

An open book with text overlaid. The background is a close-up of the pages of an open book, showing the texture of the paper and the binding. The text is overlaid in white, bold font. The text reads: "The term dispensation (*oikonomia*) which means "house managing" can be seen in Ephesians 1:10 - administration of God's rule in the millennium."

**The term dispensation (*oikonomia*) which means "house managing" can be seen in Ephesians 1:10 - administration of God's rule in the millennium.**

**“That in the dispensation [*oikonomia*] 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:”**



## **Important points in understanding dispensations:**

- 1) They are different ways of God's administering His rule over the world. They are not different ways of salvation.**
- 2) It is not an age of history. It may cover the same time period but is not a particular period of time.**
- 3) A dispensation may involve a particular way of God's administering His rule over all of mankind or over only one segment of mankind.**





# **SOME SCRIPTURAL ARGUMENTS FOR DIFFERENT DISPENSATIONS**

**Genesis 4:9-15 / Genesis 9:5-6**

**Before the flood God did not institute capital punishment for murderers but did after.**

**Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22; John 8:5 /  
1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

**Between the giving of the Mosaic Law and the death of Christ, God commanded that adulterers in Israel be put to death.**

**Exodus 20:8-11 / Romans 14:4-9; Colossians 2:13-17**

**Under the Mosaic Law Jews worshiped on Saturday but now God does not require worship on Saturday.**

**Animal sacrifices required before the death of Christ but are not required at this time.**

# **ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH DISPENSATION**

**In order for each dispensation to be distinct from all other dispensations, it must have three essential characteristics.**

**1) FIRST IT MUST HAVE A PARTICULAR WAY OF GOD'S ADMINISTERING HIS RULE**

**Each dispensation is characterized by a unique ruling factor or combination of ruling**



**2) SECOND IT MUST INVOLVE A PARTICULAR RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAN**

**Each dispensation makes man responsible to obey God in accordance with its unique ruling factor or combination of factors.**





**3) THIRD, IT MUST BE CHARACTERIZED BY DIVINE REVELATION WHICH HAD NOT BEEN GIVEN BEFORE**

**In order for man to know God's new way of ruling and his new responsibility, he must have these things revealed to him. Each new dispensation requires new revelation from God.**

# SEVEN (7) DISPENSATIONS

## 1. THE DISPENSATION OF INNOCENCY

The *Dispensation of Innocence* begins with man's creation and ends with his fall (cf. Genesis 1:26-3:24). The test of obedience was in not eating the forbidden fruit whereby they were to recognize God's headship and authority in the earth (Genesis 2:16- 17). The ruling factor was an unconfirmed favorable disposition toward God. But man failed even in this perfect environment. By Adam's failure death and sin came into the world (Genesis 3:7, 17; Romans 7:15-25).

# SEVEN (7) DISPENSATIONS

## 2. THE DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE

The *Dispensation of Conscience* begins with man's fall and ends with the flood (Genesis 4:1 - 8:14). With this dispensation the principle of the blood sacrifice was established in Genesis 3:21 and confirmed in Genesis 4:3-7. Hereby the principle of salvation through a blood sacrifice and not of works is established. Man's responsibility was, with the ruling factor of conscience and Holy Spirit conviction (Genesis 9:16), to do good and to approach God through a blood sacrifice.

# SEVEN (7) DISPENSATIONS

## 3. THE DISPENSATION OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT

The *Dispensation of Government* begins after the flood and ends with God's judgment after the Tower of Babel (Genesis 8:15-11:9). Man, with practical knowledge of his failure under conscience, is now made responsible to impose law, order and government upon his fellowman, Genesis 9:6. Man's failure is recorded in Genesis 11:1-4. God's judgment is seen in Genesis 11:5-9. God does not make a full end of man as He chooses Abram to establish Israel to be a showpiece of His grace.



# SEVEN (7) DISPENSATIONS

## 4. THE DISPENSATION OF PROMISE

The *Dispensation of Promise* (Genesis 12:1 - Exodus 18:27) begins with Abraham. Man became the recipient of unconditional promises respecting Abraham and his seed. This dispensation is elective in that God chose out one man. The ruling factor is God's promises to Abraham. The responsibility of Abram and his descendants was to remain obediently in the land. Their descent into Egypt was judgment and punishment as well as failure.



# SEVEN (7) DISPENSATIONS

## 5. THE DISPENSATION OF LAW

The *Dispensation of Law* is covered from Exodus 19:1 through Christ's death and burial. The ruling factor of the Mosaic law was to establish a unique relationship between Israel and God, requiring man to perfectly fulfill the law, Leviticus 19:2. It was intended to show man his need of redemption that only God Himself could provide. Israel's sins resulted in her eviction from the land in 70 AD.

# SEVEN (7) DISPENSATIONS

## 6. THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

The *Dispensation of Grace* begins with Christ's resurrection and concludes with Revelation 19:21. This dispensation and the Church age are not interchangeable as the church age begins with Pentecost and concludes with the rapture. In this dispensation man is responsible to the ruling factor of grace (Romans 6:14). Man again fails as the majority of Jews and Gentiles reject Jesus. God brings His judgment upon the unbelieving "church" and all the lost in the period we know as the Tribulation.

# SEVEN (7) DISPENSATIONS

## 7. THE DISPENSATION OF MILLENNIUM KINGDOM

**The *Dispensation of the Millennium Kingdom* is the final dispensation. The scriptures describing this dispensation are scattered throughout the Bible concluding with Revelation 20. The ruling factor of this age will be righteousness enforced by the personal reign of Jesus. Man's failure is prophesied in Revelation 20:7-9. The resultant judgment of the wicked will be their destruction by fire from heaven.**



# **KEY ELEMENTS OF DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY**

- 1) Distinction between Israel and the Church**
- 2) Consistent use of a single hermeneutic**
- 3) The ultimate purpose of history is the glory of God through the demonstration that He alone is sovereign.**





# **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BASED ON YOUR HERMENEUTIC**

**Is it proper (scriptural) to baptize infants as some Christian groups do?**

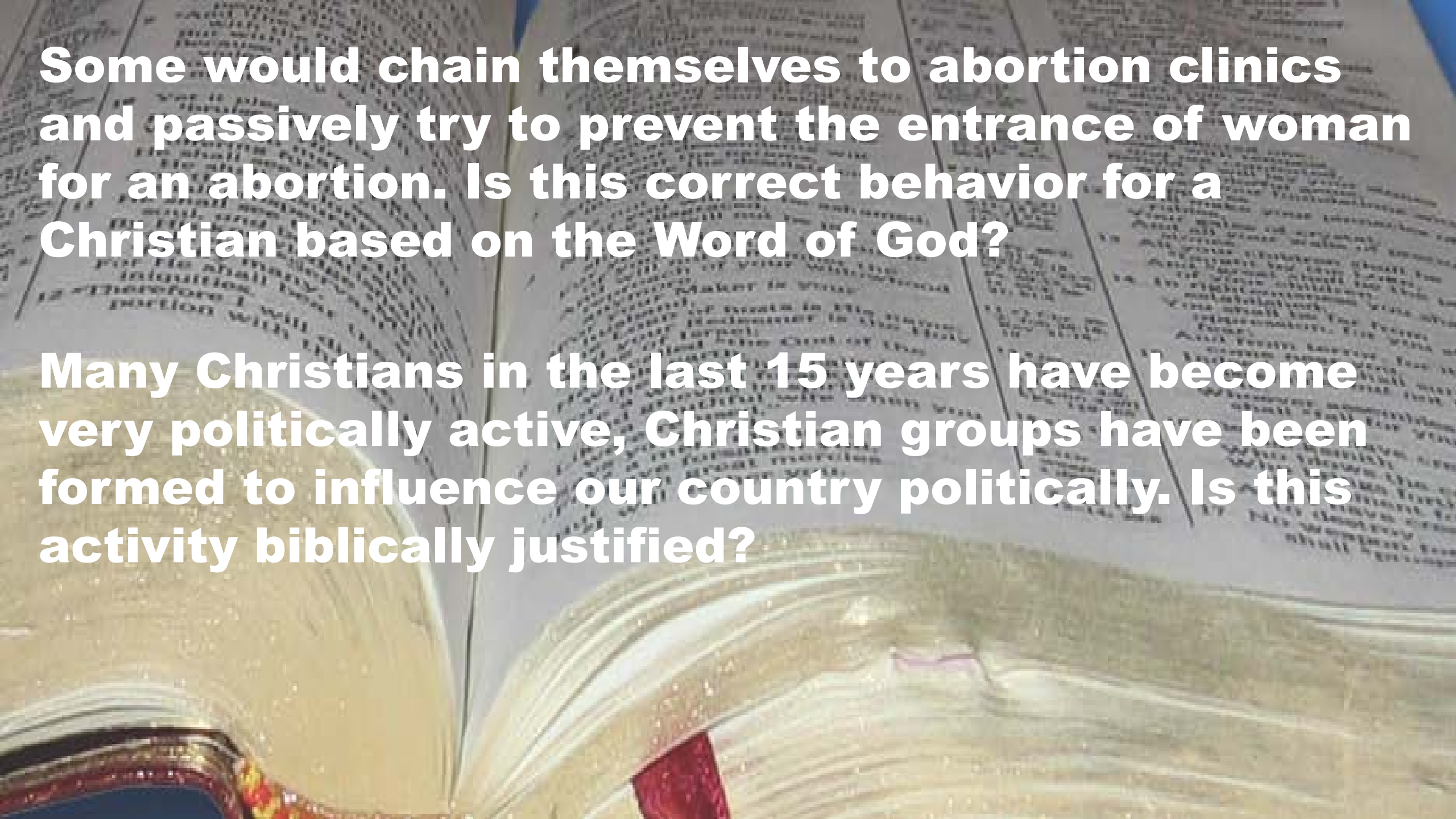
**Should we all become Sabbatarians, such as the Seventh Day Adventists or Seventh Day Baptists, and worship on Saturday?**



**The Messianic Movement has adopted many of the practices of the Mosaic System with some saying it is incumbent on believers for spiritual growth. Is this movement correct in it's understanding?**

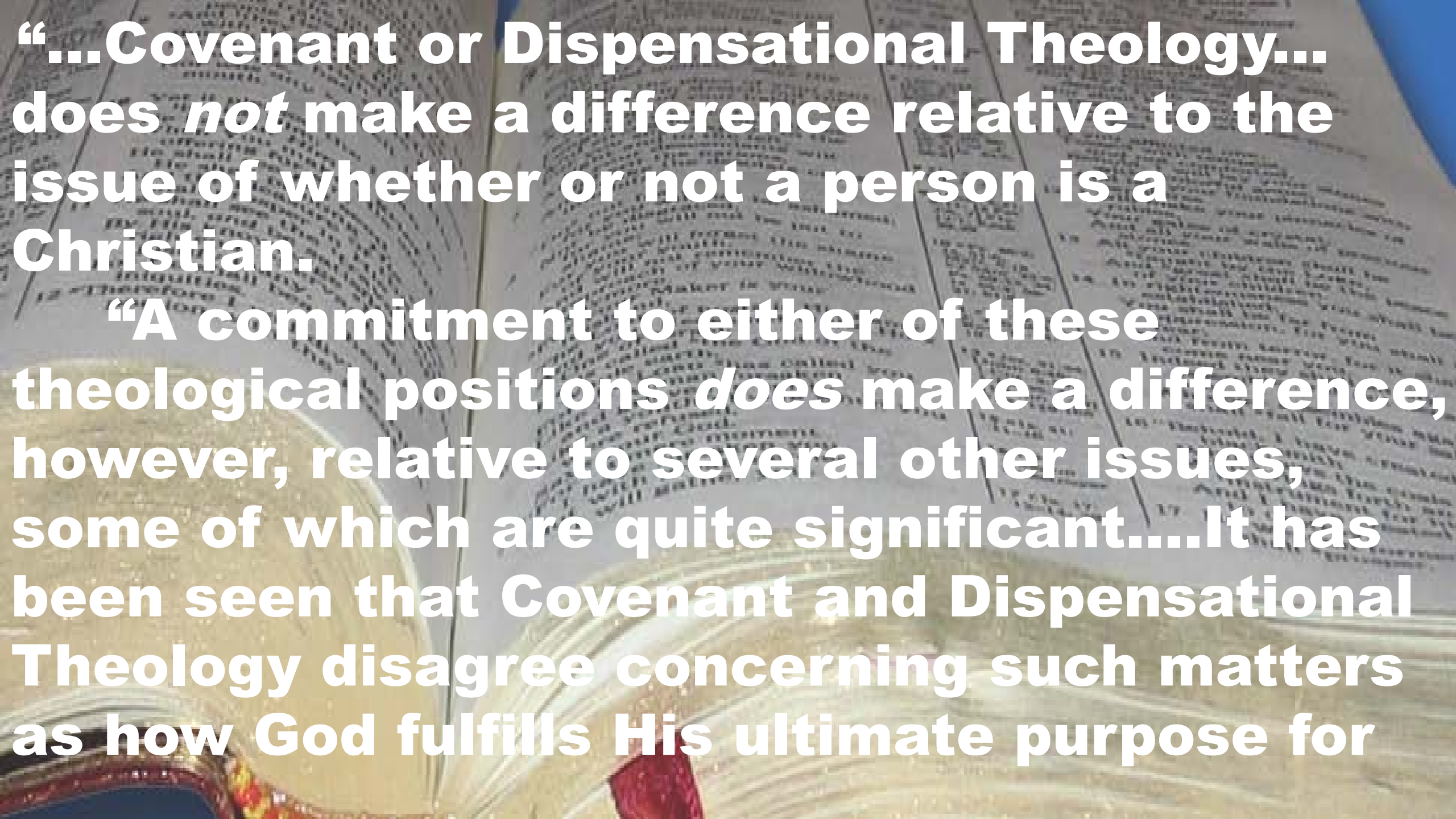
**Is it proper use of the Word of God to say it is an "abomination" for woman to wear pants based on Deuteronomy 22:5?**

**“The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.”**

An open Bible with a blue cover is shown from a top-down perspective. The pages are yellowed with age and contain faint, mostly illegible text. Overlaid on the Bible are two paragraphs of white text with a black outline. The text is centered and occupies most of the frame.

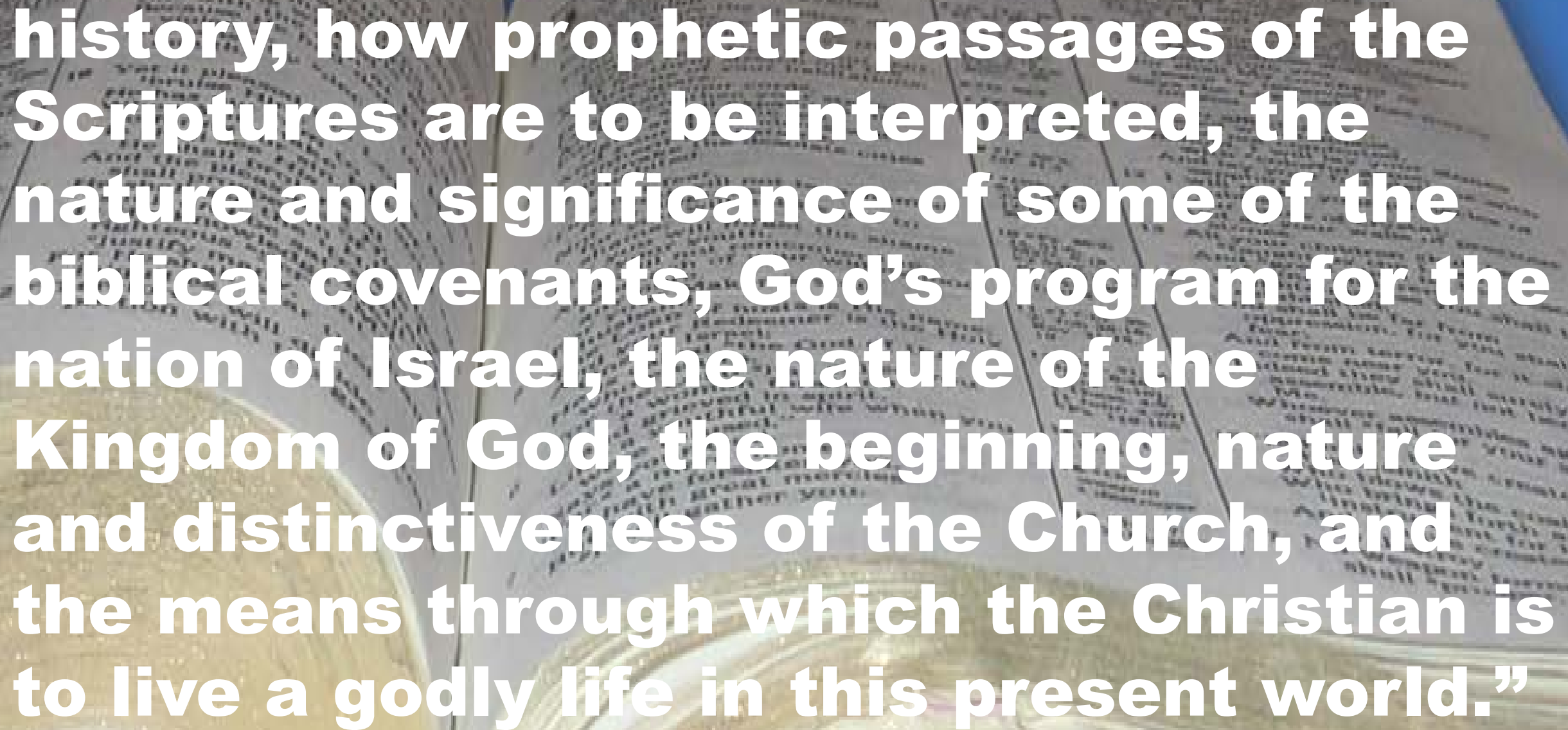
**Some would chain themselves to abortion clinics and passively try to prevent the entrance of woman for an abortion. Is this correct behavior for a Christian based on the Word of God?**

**Many Christians in the last 15 years have become very politically active, Christian groups have been formed to influence our country politically. Is this activity biblically justified?**

An open book with text overlaid. The text is in white, bold font. The background is a close-up of the book's pages, which are slightly blurred. The book is open, showing two pages. The text is centered on the pages. The overall tone is serious and academic.

**“...Covenant or Dispensational Theology...  
does *not* make a difference relative to the  
issue of whether or not a person is a  
Christian.**

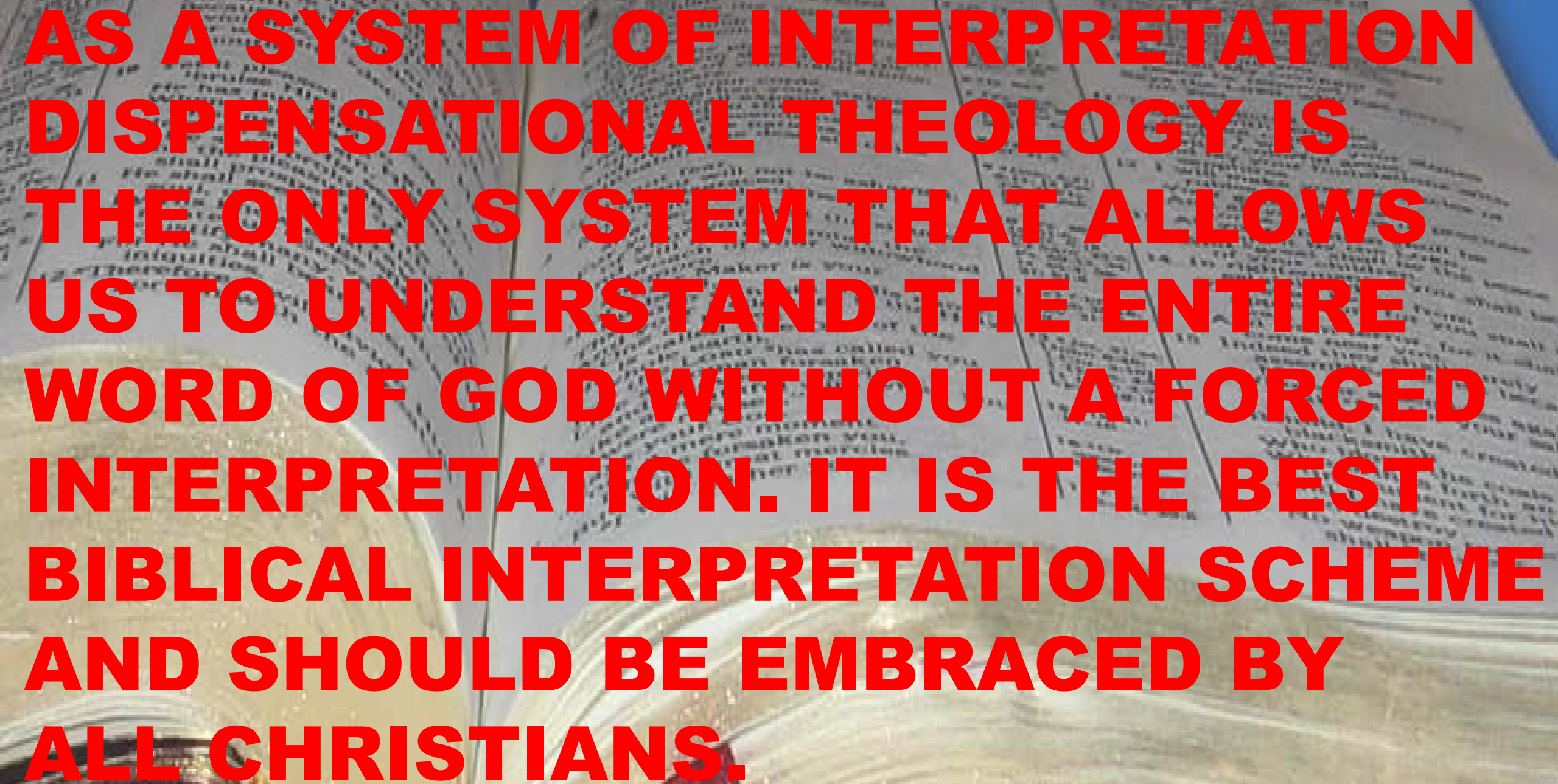
**“A commitment to either of these  
theological positions *does* make a difference,  
however, relative to several other issues,  
some of which are quite significant....It has  
been seen that Covenant and Dispensational  
Theology disagree concerning such matters  
as how God fulfills His ultimate purpose for**



**history, how prophetic passages of the Scriptures are to be interpreted, the nature and significance of some of the biblical covenants, God's program for the nation of Israel, the nature of the Kingdom of God, the beginning, nature and distinctiveness of the Church, and the means through which the Christian is to live a godly life in this present world.”**

**Dr. Renald Showers, There Really Is A Difference, page 207**



The background of the image shows an open book with text on its pages. The text is mostly illegible due to a heavy, semi-transparent grey filter. The book's pages are yellowed with age, and the binding is visible at the bottom. The overall tone is scholarly and religious.

**AS A SYSTEM OF INTERPRETATION  
DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY IS  
THE ONLY SYSTEM THAT ALLOWS  
US TO UNDERSTAND THE ENTIRE  
WORD OF GOD WITHOUT A FORCED  
INTERPRETATION. IT IS THE BEST  
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION SCHEME  
AND SHOULD BE EMBRACED BY  
ALL CHRISTIANS.**