

Bible Basics Conference 2008: Dispensations

Part 5

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[00:00:00] I'll try not to overrun.

The next session, God's progressive revelation and his purpose.

Just a verse I'd like to refer to. 2 Corinthians 6, but not yet, if you can have your finger in that page, it will be of help.

We've already seen how throughout history God has dealt in different ways with individuals and nations. And another way of looking at it, another aspect, is to look at the evidence of this in regard to the names that God has revealed himself to man.

[00:01:14] As an example, we have here this fellow, and we might ask ourselves, what do we know of him?

It seems that he's enjoying a holiday, a vacation, and perhaps we would wish we were there as well. But what can we say of him? We know nothing about him. We don't know his name. We can't see his face. We can't see the expression on his face. There's no clue. And I'd like to use this as an illustration. Here is a man. I'm going to tell you a bit more about him in due course. But from this picture, we can't say anything. We don't know what his name is. We can't see his expression. To us, he's a stranger. And in a way, this is a picture to us of how God can be to man.

[00:02:11] God exists. But for many, God is a stranger.

They may, as we can see, we can see there's a man here. They may believe that God exists. They may look around and say, I can see creation. I believe that a God or God created everything. But more than that, they cannot say. And sadly, many people today, they don't even go that far. But so we have, potentially, we have a God who is a stranger to man.

And yet, let's look at this little more, this man. Here he is. He's come home from holiday and he's gone into a bank. And here he is talking to the bank teller. He's obviously withdrawn some money.

[00:03:06] And here she is handing over some money. Now, to this bank employee, this is the same man, but he's not a stranger to her.

And also, she can see his face. So she can read certain things about his demeanor. So let's say to her, she knows him as Mr. Smith. He's a customer of the bank.

He comes in maybe once a week and she knows him. She recognizes him. When he comes in, she can say, good morning, Mr. Smith. And there's a relationship. There's a bank customer relationship, but it's very formal. She probably, if she did know his Christian name, it wouldn't be right to say, hello, Bob. It's a formal business relationship and she knows him as Mr. Smith.

[00:04:05] Well, we know something else about this Bob Smith. He's a family man. He's married with three children. And here they are having fun on a trampoline.

Now, when he gets home from work and they're at home and they run to greet him, I don't suppose they run up and say, hello, Bob, nor do they run up and say, hello, Mr. Smith. To him, he's daddy. And there's a loving relationship. They jump up into his arms and he'll give them a hug and a pat on the head and a kiss. And to him, he's daddy. Now, can you see already we have the same man, but three very different circumstances. We would be surprised if when he went into the bank, he was greeted by the bank teller in the same way that his children do. [00:05:04] Because they're in a completely different relationship. He's their daddy and they're his children. Well, here he is on his wedding day and here's his bride, his wife. And we would say she has the closest relationship with this man.

She doesn't call him Mr. Smith. She doesn't call him daddy. She calls him Bob. Maybe they've got a pet name for each other. And it's a name that only she knows or only she is entitled to use. To her, he is her husband.

And that's true for her and true only for her. It's true of no one else.

So we can say here is a relationship which is even closer and more intimate than that of his children because it's a one-to-one relationship. His three children, each of them, to them, he's their daddy.

[00:06:10] But it's a relationship that they share between themselves. Here we have a relationship which is true only of his wife. Now, I've used this as an illustration to show that the relationship that we have with God can differ depending on the name with which he's revealed himself.

And the circumstances of the enjoyment of that relationship will be very different. Now, there's one caveat I have to say because an illustration always breaks down. The thing is, of course, this man here, there was a time before his wedding when he wasn't a husband. There was a time when he wasn't a father. So the name of father wouldn't have been appropriate. [00:07:03] When we come to God, we have to be very clear and say God is outside of time. He always was what he is.

God was always a father, the father. And eternal characteristics of God, we should be very clear in saying we're not suggesting that God became anything successively. He always was, but it wasn't necessarily known to man.

If we take now the first introduction of God in the scriptures, Genesis 1, we read in the beginning,

God.

And the word there in the original or the transliteration is Elohim. And it means the creator God. It's God. In English, we use the word God.

[00:08:03] That's really a generic name, an overall name. It refers to the creator God who is overall.

And the scripture introduces us in this way. It's God, Elohim, which is plural, created the heavens and the earth.

Well, we know the Genesis story, God the creator in Genesis 1, 1. In due course, he created Adam and Eve.

And there in Genesis 2, we have a change. The Holy Spirit in penning the words it says of God, it calls him Jehovah, Elohim.

And it seems from this that we understand that the name of Jehovah is always used in connection with God's relationship with men. [00:09:05] And we get another example of this in the case of Noah. When God told Noah to build an ark, the word is God, it's Elohim. But when Noah went into the ark and we read God shut him in, the scripture uses the name Jehovah, Elohim. So Jehovah is a name of God that he has been pleased to reveal to indicate a relationship with himself.

And it means Jehovah who is, who was, and is to come. And note the order of that.

It's really a statement. God is who he is. He's eternal. He's unchanging. He's the ever existing one. And that's a statement which rests in itself. He, a God who is, but he also is a God who was. [00:10:02] And in a past time and a past eternity, he was no different from who and what he is. And it's true of future time and eternity. So God is unchanging. He's ever the same. He's outside of time. God who is, who was, and is to come.

Well, moving on in the Old Testament, we read of the patriarchs, in particular Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And they knew God by the name of revelation, El Shaddai, which means God Almighty.

And I wonder if you can get the sense of the relationship here.

God Almighty, it's very much in the order of Elohim. It's a God of power, a God of might, the one who is over all.

[00:11:03] So it's a rather distinct, distant relationship. But nevertheless, it's an advance on merely the fact that God is the creator God.

And the scripture tells us, I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of God Almighty, El Shaddai. But by my name, Jehovah, was I not known to them, Exodus 6, verse 3. Now, there's a very clear scripture that God himself has said, the patriarchs knew me by one name, but by another name, I was not known to them. I think we can say it's not necessarily meant to imply that they weren't aware of the name Jehovah, because clearly that was used of Adam onwards. But I think what's meant is that it wasn't in that relationship. They didn't know God in that relationship of Jehovah. [00:12:05] They knew that it was his name, but their dealings with him was in regard to God

Almighty, El Shaddai. And Abraham was 99 years old when Jehovah appeared to Abraham and said unto him, I am the Almighty God. Two things here. It's clear that God always was Jehovah.

The scriptures say that when he appeared to Abraham and said, I am the Almighty God, the scripture refers to him as Jehovah. It's the same person. It's not that he was Almighty God and he became Jehovah. It's not now circumstances like we understand of ourselves where we become something we weren't before. When it comes to God, he always ever was Jehovah, but he came to Abraham as the Almighty God.

[00:13:05] Jehovah, as we've said, means who is, who was, and is to come. And it's in particular a name that's linked with the nation of Israel.

God spoke to Moses and said to him, I am Jehovah, Exodus 6, verse 2. It's interesting to see that if we accept that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, Moses, having come to know God by this name of Jehovah, by the Spirit, is free to use that name in his historical writings. So he uses the name Jehovah to refer to God historically at a time when Moses himself had not necessarily learned that name. But he was free to use it of the past. Another scriptural proof that God, these names of God apply back in time and back in eternity. [00:14:06] But here we have this clear statement. I have also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. So I suggest that this name Jehovah, in connection with the nation of Israel, is linked up with this covenant. They were in covenant relationship with God. It was something that was true of them that wasn't true of the nations. They had been strangers. And other nations were still strangers. And those strangers did not and could not know God as Jehovah. And so it's an entirely different relationship. It's now a matter of privilege which God has bestowed upon the nation of Israel and them alone. So it's a bit like those three girls, the children, only they have a relationship to that man as daddy. [00:15:05] Well, when it comes to our own time, all true Christians, we have a relationship with God which goes beyond that of the nation of Israel, beyond that of the patriarchs. It's a family relationship.

Maybe we could have other descriptions, but I hope you're happy with that. It's at least true in itself. We are children and sons of God.

The Lord Jesus himself said to the woman at the well, that Samaritan woman, The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father seeks such to worship him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. I won't say any more about that because I'll be encroaching on later session. [00:16:01] I would like now just to refer to that scripture in 2 Corinthians 6 and the second part of verse 16.

As God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord. And touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you. And ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Now here the Apostle Paul is referring to an Old Testament scripture, and he's using it to drive home this wonderful truth, that God has said to those who believe on the Lord Jesus that I will be a father unto you. And notice at the end it says Seth, the Lord Almighty.

[00:17:04] So there we have an Old Testament name.

That's the person saying that I will be to you a father. It's a new relationship, but it's the same person. And so God always was the father. He always had the son.

Proverbs 8, I'm very glad our brother Hugh used that as a reference. There, the father and the son in eternity past, in the counsel of God, their thoughts were with the sons of men. So it's the same person, that eternal relationship, but it's now been revealed. Israel, the patriarchs, Adam and Eve, they did not know God as the father. He was such, but it wasn't in his mind and will at that time to reveal such a part of his characteristic.

So just to summarize, if we start off with, we might say, the very lowest revelation, [00:18:08] Elohim, God the creator, men as creatures. Now, it's a remote and distant, is that my phone going off?

Embarrassing.

It's a remote and a distant relationship, and potentially all men can know God as such. If they're observant, if they look around and they acknowledge creation is the work of a creator, they can say, yes, there is a God, God the creator. But more than that, they don't necessarily know. Then the patriarchs, I've summarized this as a relationship of friendship, and I base that on the fact that the scripture says Abraham was called friend of God. So it's certainly a less remote and distant relationship. It's a matter of knowledge and friendship.

[00:19:03] They had the privilege of knowing God, God Almighty, being friend of God. That's a wonderful privilege, and it's certainly a closer relationship than merely knowing God as creator. But then God comes in, in a special way. He takes up this nation of Israel. Why did he pick Israel?

Were they the best nation? Were they the most deserving, the best looking, the most effective, the most intelligent? No, there was absolutely no reason, humanly speaking, why God should have chosen the nation of Israel. It was a matter of sovereignty, a matter of grace. But he took them up, he took them out of the nations around them, and he established a covenant with them, and thereby he revealed to them this name of Jehovah. And then we might say the highest pinnacle, God fully revealed now as father. [00:20:03] And it's true of all Christians. It's a family relationship. We're children of God, and that's a very wonderful thing. You think of those children illustrated with their father. Think of what it is to the relationship between children and a father. Certainly much more intimate and wonderful than those which preceded it. But also, you know, in our relationship by virtue of what the Lord Jesus has done, not only are we children of God, but we're sons of God. And I suggest that brings out even more fully the wonderful revelation of God towards us, and the relationship we have with him, that we're sons of God.

And it's a matter of wonderful privilege to know God as such. So, God is now fully revealed, and his name of the father, just a few verses to establish that. [00:21:05] I ascend unto my father, and your father, and to my God, and your God. The words of the Lord Jesus in John 20, 17.

God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his son.

And so, the Lord Jesus himself, the son, revealed the father.

And the scriptures are very plain and clear, that only the son could reveal the father to us. Blessed be

the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Now, this is an example of what we can bring in worship and praise. Not just merely acknowledging God as creator, not to call upon God as God Almighty or Jehovah, [00:22:01] but to take up such a theme. Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therewith, bless we God, even the father. Another New Testament verse bringing out this wonderful relationship we have.