

Bible Basics Conference 2008: Dispensations

Part 13

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[00:00:01] O God, our Father, we come before Thee once again, and we give thanks that Thy word was read to us and explained to us this morning. We give thanks for those things that have occupied us, and we give thanks that our thoughts and our hearts and minds have been directed towards Thy beloved Son, our Lord and our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee, O gracious God, for every precious thought of Himself, and we pray that we may each one here see this day as being something for His glory, as well as for our own help and benefit from day to day. Now, as Thou hast helped us in considering Thy word so far, we look to Thee for Thy help for those who will answer the questions. We thank Thee for the interest shown, and we do pray that Thou will give us subject hearts that we may look for the [00:01:06] answer within Thy word as taught by the Holy Spirit. So we just commit ourselves to Thee. We pray, too, for the sessions to take place afterwards. Pray for the speakers this afternoon. Give them their strength, we pray Thee, in and through the worthy and precious name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. Now, we have one, two, three, four lots of questions, and I have successfully delegated them all to the other speakers this morning according to the subject matter. So I wonder if, please, Michael would answer the first question. I'm going to ask each one who's going to answer to come up here and read the question out, and then answer it. Unfortunately, we are, not unfortunately, we are a large company, and to have a conversational [00:02:07] discussion of every question, while it might be profitable, would logistically be difficult. So if you'll bear with it, we will have one answer. If anyone else has a burning contribution to make on that topic, then please come to the front and make it after the question has been answered. Otherwise, we will answer the questions one by one as we come to them. So Michael, if you could please bring the first question. Thank you, Hugh. Well, having seen the question, I decided that next year I think I'll allocate them. The question is, would people in previous dispensations have eternal judgment in brackets or blessing as it was not the day of grace? In brackets, not the Jews. Should I read that [00:03:08] again? I read it twice as well, at least. Would people in previous dispensations have eternal judgment or blessing as it was not the day of grace? So it's two questions, really.

One is, what happens with believers in the Old Testament, in particular in other dispensations than the Jewish one or that of the law? And second question is, what happens to unbelievers in Old Testament times? What will happen to them in eternity? Perhaps I can offer some sort of starting points in attempting a response. In Genesis, you find that God breathes his spirit into man. And what

distinguishes man from that point onwards from beast is a living soul. Man [00:04:06] has an immortal soul. Now, that applies to man in any dispensation. Perhaps that's already the answer. But I think there are some other indications. Before the time of the church, so in previous dispensations, the Lord Jesus spoke already about hell. And he said it's the place where worm dies not. So it's a place of eternal torment. And that's not linked in any way to the particular dispensation we live in. There's another verse that's interesting in that context with regard to unbelievers from Old Testament times. In Peter's first epistle, I just read from chapter three, verse 19, by which also the spirit, by which also he went [00:05:10] and preached unto the spirits in prison. There are spirits, there are men who are kept in prison for the day of judgment. And when it comes to, I think it's Acts 17, where it speaks about the Lord as judge, it says that God has set a man to judge this world. I can't put my finger on the other verse. There's one Timothy that says the living and the dead. Now, there are two groups. It's not the people from this dispensation and that and the other. It's the living and the dead. And that judgment has been reserved to Christ. And at the great white throne in Revelation 20, the dead, actually it doesn't say they are raised. It says they appear before, they have to stand [00:06:06] before the great white throne. And I think we have to leave it as general as that. It's the dead. It's those who did not follow that one way of salvation, faith. Now, with regard to believers, it's clear that Old Testament believers had the hope of resurrection. You can think of Job, incidentally not from the Jewish economy. You can think of Joseph. Again, before the time of the law, they all had the hope of resurrection. Well, that doesn't prove it's eternal. But if you read the book of Revelation, you come to a place in chapter 19 where the marriage supper of the lamb is described. And the bride makes herself ready. Now, that's the church. And then it says in verse 9 or 10, blessed are they that have been called or invited to the marriage supper of the lamb. So, [00:07:06] there is another group. In heaven, there is not only the church, but there are all heavenly believers. And when I say heavenly, I mean those who have gone through death. So, again, for Old Testament believers, the answer is yes, there will be eternal blessing. Now, will it be exactly the same blessing? Well, I didn't say that. There are, as Ephesians 3 says, there are different families. Paul says, I bow my knees before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, before whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. So, there are different families. But every person has an immortal soul. And it is following a principle, really, that this, the time a man spends on this [00:08:02] earth is the stage where the question is resolved, where is he going to spend eternity? And as far as I can see, this applies to any dispensation. Thank you, Michael. Could we go on to the next question, please, rather early? The question is, how do we maintain the principle of practicing good works without it ever crossing our minds that these works we do are because we are not trying to fulfil part of the law, but they are the fruit of the Spirit? Second question, how can we avoid feeling pleased that we are fulfilling something? To answer the last question first, [00:09:03] with difficulty, but we'll come back to that at the end. You'll have noticed from the programme that tomorrow afternoon we have two sessions on the relation of dispensational truth and daily living, or as we might say, the effect of a proper understanding of dispensational teaching on daily living. And we mustn't encroach on that. That's why we seem to stop short with a statement which is going to be developed in later sessions. But without stealing anyone else's thunder, I will answer what I would like to look at as a negative side and a positive side. And if you look at Romans chapter 6, verse 1, what shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may [00:10:09] abound? The question here is, Paul has made it plain, and we've tried to make it plain, that eternal salvation is the fruit of personal faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fact that he died for us and rose again. And that there's no contribution you and I could ever make towards our eternal salvation. So, having taught the truth plainly, Paul says, well, does that mean you can do as you like? Of course not. It is God's will, as the scripture says, that we live soberly as to ourselves, righteously as to others, and godly in our relation with the Lord Jesus himself. So, there's no suggestion that we should do as we like.

[00:11:10] Now, the other verse is chapter 8 and verse 4, which was alluded to in the notes, Romans 8, 4, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.

When we were saved, God put his Holy Spirit within us to guide us and to control us.

He gave us a new nature that was capable of pleasing him. Now, it would have been easy for you and me if, at the same time, he'd taken the old nature out of us and disposed of that. So, nice [00:12:01] and simple, we've got a nature that desires to please God and a Holy Spirit that empowers us to live in a way that please God. But God has not worked that way. His desire is that we please him because we choose to please him. And in any situation, any moment of any day, we are in a situation where we have a choice. Either we can allow the old nature to assert itself or we can allow the new nature to assert itself. We've judged the old nature. We've said, well, God brought that to an end in the death of Christ. And I now want to please God, but I realise I haven't any power in myself and the only power available is the Spirit of God. Now, we can see the working out [00:13:05] of this in Romans 7 and Romans 8. In Romans 7, about 51 times, I think it is, you get references to me, my, mine, and I. And he finishes up in a proper mess by the end of the chapter. That's because it's full of self. In chapter 8, there's almost no reference to self and certainly not disappointment with self because self is not evident. What is evident is that about 20 times over, you have the result of the power of the Holy Spirit working from within. Works are looking at things from the outside and taking their shape from the character of the world. Christianity is having the Holy Spirit and a life implanted within you, which in the power of [00:14:09] the Holy Spirit can express itself in a way that pleases God. Not now working from the outside in, but from the inside out. And that is the way we please God as we read Romans 6, 7 and 8.

Now, that's the easy bit because scripture makes it plain. The hard bit is this. How do we maintain the principle of practising good works without it ever crossing our minds that these works we do are because we are trying to fulfil the law, but they are the fruit of the Spirit? I won't try to analyse that sentence. It's working from the inside out, not the outside in. But there's no doubt.

[00:15:02] There's something in me. The Bible calls it the flesh, the old nature. There's something in me which, if I notice that I'm doing something that's worthwhile and good, oh, I'm very disappointed if nobody notices. Aren't you? Well, that's the flesh. And we know the principle, the doctrine, that it's not what we do that earns our salvation. And we know that it's only by the power of the Spirit that we can do anything that pleases God. But if you say, how do you avoid thinking that at times that, oh, you are good there, you did the right thing. All we can say is, get thou behind me, Satan. We know it's not of the Lord, it's not of the Spirit. And the same with the last question, how can we avoid feeling pleased that we are fulfilling something? Well, [00:16:02] it's always a safe solution. One or two of us were talking about this. If you find you're doing something which you know is displeasing to the Lord, you accept the responsibility for that, confess it to the Lord. If by some mischance you find yourself doing something that you know is commendable, don't preen yourself and take the credit for it, give the credit to the Lord. It's always a safe division to make. Thank you. Thank you, Ilana. Brother Nick, you have eight minutes. Do you think you can deal with the questions? Probably not, but it may get me out of a fix. Okay, the first question is, Christ died for the sin of the world. Can you explain the difference between sin and sins [00:17:01] from Scripture, please? Well, I suppose I let myself in for this. I did emphasise, as a matter of importance, that we should distinguish between sin and sins. And, of course, I was referring to John the Baptist's exclamation, behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. If you listen, I think it's to Handel's Messiah. If it's sung, I think it's

misquoted. It's often misquoted. It's not which takes away the sins of the world. Sin is the thing itself. It's the concept, we might say. It's the fact or the principle that man cannot live up to the holiness and righteousness of God. We're born in sin.

[00:18:02] And it's basically the principle of the fall. The fall of Adam and Eve has resulted in the fact that every man, woman, boy and girl who's ever lived ever since is born in sin. Sometimes, we may read a verse which sounds like a definition of sin. And there's one verse which says, in one translation, sin is transgression of the law. And that might mislead us into thinking that sin is really disobedience from the law. We might say, well, in that case, sin could only have come in when the law was introduced. But really, it's a mistranslation, I suggest, to you. A better translation is sin is lawlessness. In other words, it's not so much breaking the law, but it's the concept, the principle of self-will. And it's the complete opposite of the character of God. So, there's this big problem. There has [00:19:02] been this big problem from the very beginning of the matter of sin. And it's that problem and it's that principle that God dealt with on the cross. The Lord Jesus, He died and He dealt with sin. When Three Hours of Darkness came upon this scene, when the Lord Jesus cried those words, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? It was because God as a holy and a righteous God could not have to do with the man who has made sin. And it's a terrible thing to think of the Lord Jesus, the one who was ever in the Father's bosom, the Son, as man being conscious of being forsaken of God. But there it is. We have it in scripture that God himself drew a veil over that scene. But the life of the Lord Jesus proved that here and here alone had been a perfect [00:20:09] man. And it wasn't that this took God by surprise, but it was really to establish it as a witness before God and man that Lord Jesus led a perfect life. He was the only one to answer to the demands of a spotless and perfect lamb. So because of the perfection of the Lord Jesus, God fully accepted Christ's death as a matter dealing with sin. We might read a verse in Romans 3. It says of Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood. And this matter of propitiation, it deals with the demands of a righteous and holy God. And we can say without any argument, any doubt, that the Lord [00:21:09] Jesus, his death on the cross, dealt fully with the matter of sin. It was done away with. We often say God does not forgive sin. He doesn't forgive sin. He cannot forgive sin. He's a holy and a righteous God. Sin was dealt with. The punishment was paid for it. Sin is not forgiven. It's dealt with. It's done away. And that then clears the way for God to come out in blessing. And the Lord Jesus, he dealt with the sin of the world, all of it in its entirety. But now it's a question of practicalities. And the verse goes on to say, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are passed through the forbearance of God. Now sins are those acts which we commit because we have a sinful nature. And sins were committed [00:22:06] even before the law was given. It's a demonstration of a moral separation between God and man. And those sins which we as individuals commit, they can be forgiven if we accept the work of Christ. And there's a verse which escapes me at the moment. Perhaps another brother can help me out. It's quite clear. It says, the Lord Jesus bore the sins of many. And there's this distinction between what he did for all, for the world, or what he did for many. In other words, we know there are sadly many who never believe and accept the work of Christ. And their sins are not forgiven. But if we shelter under the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, then our sins can and are forgiven. So there is this important distinction between sin and sins. I hope that's enough in the time. Now, we have three questions. And I don't think we can deal [00:23:08] absolutely with all of the details, but we'll do our best. The starting point for grace. Is not the grace of God evident in the Old Testament, examples of such? Well, that may be a question better addressed to Ernie, who took up the matter of grace and law. But I think, for myself, I would refer us to Adam and Eve again. Adam and Eve sinned. They were disobedient. And they attempted to deal with the matter themselves. They made themselves aprons of fig leaves. But it was God that provided a covering. And you might say, did they deserve to be covered? Did they earn a right to be covered by virtue of their own

attempt? And the answer is no. [00:24:06] So I think that's an example of grace. Undeserved favor. God didn't have to do it, but he did. In grace, he provided a covering. So I'd say that's probably a very first example of grace. And I'm sure there are many others. So we can say that the grace of God was evident in the Old Testament, certainly from Adam and Eve onwards. Question two. The faith of those in Hebrews 11 is generally in response to a present situation or something future. They believed God.

Can't quite read the writing. Please explain what faith was needed for their salvation, i.e., forgiveness of sins. Under law, a sacrifice was offered according to the law. [00:25:04] We know that the sacrifice was a type of Christ and his death. They could not know that. What did they have to believe? Surely every offerer was not saved.

I think the question here is really making a distinction between saving faith in the list of faith in Hebrews and the examples given. And I wouldn't have a problem with that. But I think the whole tenor of chapter 11 is to demonstrate this principle of faith, that it goes right back to the beginning. And all those individuals and the nation are given as examples of faith.

So certainly they didn't necessarily have saving faith in regard to the specific examples [00:26:02] given. They were in response to their circumstances. But surely the point is that they had faith in God. And if we take, for example, those in the nation of Israel, in the wilderness, they were given instructions as to offerings. And I'm sure they went through the motions. But in 1 Corinthians 10, we're told that God was not pleased with the most of them and their bodies were strewn in the desert. So again, we can say just because an individual was part of the nation of Israel and went through outwardly the motions of going through obedience to the offerings and sacrifices, it seems that 1 Corinthians 10 tells us that God was not pleased with them. So certainly not every offer was saved. But the fact that they're mentioned in [00:27:01] Hebrews 11, the point is that they had faith in God. And in regard to whatever their limitations of their day and dispensation, it's a matter of God's sovereignty. I don't think we can be dogmatic and say, well, this character was saved and this one wasn't. But the scriptures make it clear. Some of them mentioned God considered their faith and counted it to them for righteousness.

And for others, we can say the scripture tells us God was not pleased. So there must be a distinction. So I really go back to the point of the address, that it's saving faith is a belief in God, trusting in God for whatever circumstances they were in. And if it's true of temporal circumstances, it's surely true of eternal circumstances also. [00:28:07] Yeah, Romans 4 verse 3, for what saith the scripture, Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Yeah. Just on the third question, which also includes some statements, faith is a gift of God.

Was the speaker referring to saving faith or simply to the gift in the sense of George Muller? I suppose that's a reference to the very clear gift of faith that that brother had. [00:29:03] Just a continuity problem here. Ephesians 2 verse 8 does not support such a contention. The gift is salvation, not of faith. I think I've misread the questioner's question. Please forgive me. I think the point I was trying to make, whether or not that verse supports that contention or not, the point I was making is that it's a matter of God's sovereignty. And if we have faith, it's not something that we can glory in ourselves. But if we read Ephesians 2 verse 1, we're told there, and you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Well, if we're dead in trespasses and sins, which we are because the scripture [00:30:07] states very

plainly, then we're dead. There's nothing in us. There's no possibility that we can have faith. There's no possibility that we can believe. So in regard to the power that man has, there isn't any. And the scripture shows us it's a work of God. You hath he quickened. And so it's God's grace, a work that he does in the soul. And there are many verses that we would need to look at, but I think we can conclude, we can just summarize this matter, that whether it's belief or faith, we have to see that it's from God's side. God gave Adam and Eve the skins. They attempted a covering of their own, and it was a complete failure. It couldn't do anything. [00:31:04] And it was God's sovereignty and grace that provided a covering of skins. And so it is all through man's history. If we have belief, if we have faith, we have to see from God's side, it's a work of his grace and sovereignty.