

Bible Basics Conference 2008: Dispensations

Part 16

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[00:00:01] I ask the Lord for his help for this closing session.

Gracious God, our Father, we give thanks for what we have heard and what we have seen, what has been shown to us from thy precious Word. We give thanks for yesterday, we give thanks for this afternoon, and we pray that we may yet retain those things that we have taken in from thy precious Word. Help us to look them up when we get home, help us to enter into them and to make them our own, that we may have the better appreciation of not only our own position, but of what thou wouldst have for thy beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who was rejected in this world, but the one who one day is going to return and his feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives, that point from which he arose. [00:01:05] And we pray that thou will impress us more with thy plans concerning his glory.

So help us now as we deal with these questions, give wisdom, give direction, we pray, and give us all to be subject to the words that the Holy Spirit teaches.

We ask these things and give thanks. In the precious name of the Lord Jesus, Amen.

We have, in fact, about ten questions to deal with tonight.

And as Brother David has just said, different brothers have been asked to answer them. However, there were two that didn't fall into any particular session that we've had, [00:02:01] and against my better judgment, they've persuaded me to deal with them. So let's do those first. Before you go on, may I just emphasize what you have already said, and remind the brethren that there's an awful lot of clearing up to do after this meeting.

First question.

Literal interpretation of the Bible depends on believing the whole is inspired.

What of doubtful passages like 1 John 5 verse 7 and the end of Mark's gospel?

Doubtful passages.

Let me separate those two scriptures immediately. 1 John 5 7 is believed not to have been in the original text of the scriptures.

And if you read the chapter, you will see that that verse speaks about bearing witness in heaven.
[00:03:02] How can witness be born in heaven?

The scripture should just refer to what it says in 1 John 5 8, there are three that bear witness, not on earth, there are three that bear witness, the spirit, the water, and the blood. Doubtful verse indeed.

And the end of Mark's gospel.

Dear friends, there is nothing spurious about the end of Mark's gospel. I know that many would have it end after verse 8, but if you just turn very quickly to Mark 16 and verse 8, you will see that it leaves the disciples going away trembling and afraid. Do you really think that the Holy Spirit would cause a gospel, one of the four that speak of the Lord Jesus, to end like that?

The rest of the chapter brings in things which are wholly necessary.

[00:04:02] We said yesterday something about the canon of scripture, how one part of scripture corresponds with another. And in the latter part of Mark's gospel, there is the appearance of the Lord to his own. Now that's important, isn't it? There is his commission to his disciples to go out and preach the gospel to every creature, and he speaks of baptizing. But finally, there is a remarkable verse that we don't get anywhere else, but it corresponds with the start of the gospel. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God.

The servant's gospel ends with Christ seated at the right hand of God. And how did it begin?

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

So the end corresponds with the beginning.

[00:05:02] Very few spurious passages in here. They are the exceptions. 1 John 5, 7 is one.

There are very, very few spurious passages in the Bible that we have in our hands.

I trust that suffices for that. Now the second question is a little longer, but it's very real. There have been Christians who have by no choice of their own thrust into positions of authority in their work, I think, and in the past and in the present day, e.g. Joseph Esther.

In this present day and age, are there positions of authority to be only interpreted in the light of 1 Corinthians 6, verses 14 to 16?

That passage speaks of being united with harlots, [00:06:05] and undoubtedly the answer must be yes. But let's go on to the third part.

In this present day and age, is it possible for a Christian to remain in such a position of authority in

that having fellowship, communion, concord, have part or to be in agreement with the unbelievers under his or her authority?

This is a very real question, but let me deal with the first bit first. The examples, Joseph and Esther, were not living in the Christian dispensation.

So leave aside how they came to those positions.

They were not living in the day of grace. Now what does the Apostle Paul say?

For those things that were gained for me, I counted loss for Christ.

[00:07:03] Now Paul was brought up with every advantage.

He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. If there was a position of high authority to be had in the Jewish world, and bear in mind that the religious world and the political world in those days were very closely united, it could have been his.

It could have been his.

But meeting the Lord of Glory changed his life for him.

And you know, he's our example. We heard about that this afternoon. The Apostle Paul is a wonderful example for us. So he did not seek worldly authority.

And that should be our attitude too. But whatever our attitude to positions of power and authority, sooner or later in life, we may find ourselves in such a position.

[00:08:02] Whether we've sought it, whether we haven't, and this is part of life.

I know, again, he wasn't exactly living in a Christian era, but there was a centurion, wasn't there, who met the Lord, and he said to the Lord, I also am a man under authority, and I have people under me, and I say to one, go, and he goeth, and to another, come, and he cometh, and so on. This is part of life, and it is a very real question. What do we do if we find ourselves in such a position? Well, isn't the answer that we do our work for the Lord? We do it unto Him.

If we find ourselves working for an employer who requires us to do things that we really cannot do, well, then we need to carefully consider our position. I'm not going to pick specifics, because I'm not going to be tempted into saying [00:09:01] some jobs are in that position and some are not. But as to having communion or concord with those beneath you or indeed above you, that's not required.

What is required is that you do the job that you're there to do. It does not mean having concord with them in what they do in their spare time.

You have to be very careful about that, I know. What do we do at five o'clock, where do we go?

These are practical problems, and each one has to answer them for himself or for herself. It is a fact of life that we may find ourselves in positions of authority, but the circumstances in each case, we

need to be aware of them and to pray to the Lord to direct us in whatever circumstance we're in. Now, I don't doubt a great deal more could be said on that, but I trust I've given you the gist of what I believe [00:10:05] the Scriptures would teach us. Now, can I ask Brother Andrew, please, to come and deal with his three questions?

All these questions have to do with the subject of prayer, so perhaps I could make a suggestion to the conveners.

I think I can speak for all of them. I say that we've profited and enjoyed our time together, and we wish to thank all involved who speak and who organize behind the scenes for the encouragement we have enjoyed.

All these four questions, what leads me to say that is that all these four questions are about prayer, [00:11:03] and they are intelligent questions, and it shows that thought has been given to the subject. So my answers are only going to be suggestive because they cannot be exhaustive because of time constraints, but I think it's good that they might be suggestive in another point of view because it may lead you back to the Scriptures to search and to look into these things for yourself. The first question is, would it be right for a non-believer to address God as Father? Please explain.

In Psalm 147 and verse 9, it says that God hears the ravens that call.

Other Scriptures speak of God as a faithful creator.

He's going to hear the voice of his creature.

[00:12:01] In fact, Hebrews 11 tells us as much, where there's faith, he that cometh to God in verse 6 of Hebrews 11, he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them or those that diligently seek him.

There's some very unintelligent prayers go up to God. Like someone said, the prayers went up all wrong, but they came down right. And some people in their extremity even are praying almost to an unknown God. You know, when people's conversion stories, they say, God, if you're there, please answer me. Please show me your reality. And they'll be led through the Scriptures or through believers or through, even the creation bears the impress of God showing his eternal power and divinity. So if there's faith that really reaches out to God, God will take account of it. He is spoken of in Hebrews 12, 9 [00:13:02] as the father of spirits.

So spiritual beings, there's a sense in which we generally speak of the fatherhood of God in relation to believers and that is a specific and special idea in connection with it and that which Scripture gives most emphasis to. But there is a sense in which in a creatorial way, God is father as the originator.

For instance, in Luke 20, verse 38, the Lord is speaking about the intermediate state, what happens to men after death and before resurrection. And he uses the words, all live unto God. Well, all live unto God in a creatorial sense.

As Paul says elsewhere, preaching, in whom we live and move and have our being. And in Ephesians chapter 4, we have three circles, three widening concentric circles.

[00:14:01] We start with the circle of reality where it says there's one body and one spirit, even as we're called in one hope of our calling. That's what Simon brought before us, that baptized by one spirit into one body. One body, the reality, those who have faith, those who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, one body and one spirit, one hope of our calling, the hope of being with Christ and like Christ in glory. And then there's a widening circle, it's the circle of profession, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. It's those believers or unbelievers, whoever, it's those who publicly acknowledge and confess Christ as Lord. And we know that is true of many in Christendom who do not have the reality in their hearts. There's one Lord, there's one faith, there's the Christian faith and there's one baptism. That's Christian baptism in water.

Christian baptism is introductory. It says one baptism, it doesn't say two baptisms. You don't need to be baptized twice. So you've got the circle of reality, [00:15:02] you've got the circle of profession, and then you've got the wider circle because it widens out into one God and Father of all, who's above all and through all and in you all. Well, I think that takes in any rational being. So God hears and thank God he does hear and he has heard us in our unconverted days and he's a gracious God who's given his son for our salvation.

So it doesn't perhaps matter what terms somebody uses if there's faith in their approach to God. We know Paul says to Timothy, there's one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, and it's through Christ we have the link with God and that's prominent in the preaching to whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

So in the first instance, a non-believer should call upon the Lord and if he speaks to God as Father, God's not going to refuse to listen to him if motivated by genuine faith, [00:16:01] but he's certainly not in a relationship at that point as a son with a father because sonship supposes, the intelligence of sonships supposes the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul says, because ye are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his son into our hearts whereby we cry, Abba, Father. So that's the first question.

Since God has now been revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is it proper to address each in prayer and worship?

Three persons in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Is it proper to address each?

Well, the first thing I would say here is that there's no evidence, there's no indication, there's no example of direct address to the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

[00:17:03] And that would follow from what I've last said. If God has sent the Holy Spirit forth into our hearts whereby we cry, Abba, Father, it's the spirit of God in us that is producing the prayer or the worship or the link up to God.

In a sense, if we were to turn in upon our, if we were to seek to address the Holy Spirit, we would be turning in upon ourselves. And I don't just say going so far as to be praying to ourselves, but that we would be looking in the wrong direction. Of course, there are doxologies to God. God bless it forever.

And in the Scripture that we've had before us in Romans 4, it says God is a spirit.

And God in his fullness is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And there are times when, in speaking of God, we may be thinking of God in the plurality, God in the trinity of being, God as Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. But there is a Scripture [00:18:01] which has helped me on this subject, and that is 1 Corinthians 8, verses 5 and 6.

And it's contrasting Christian worship, Christian belief with heathenism.

And it says in verse 5, there are gods many and lords many.

Behind idolatry, an idol is nothing in the world.

There's no God but one.

But then it says there are in the world gods many and lords many. The demons are behind these beings. And you just need to go to a country like India and see the way that people are bowing down and worshiping idols and opening themselves to evil spirits and even demon possession. In contrast to that, in verse 6 it says, there's one God, the Father. This is the way in the mediatorial system. This is how God has been revealed to us in Christianity. [00:19:02] There's but one God, the Father, of whom are all things. That's the verse I already mentioned in passing. But there's one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ. And the implication there is just as the idolaters and heathen go to their lords many and their gods many, what do we as Christians do? We come to one God who's made known to us as the Father, and we come to the one Lord Jesus Christ. So I think it's clear from this verse and clear from examples in the scripture that it's fitting and proper that we address God as Father, as the Father, and we address the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer and worship.

And there's no indication or no example of direct address in prayer to the Holy Spirit, though we know that the Holy Spirit is God. And when we think of God in his full being, we think of the Holy Spirit also.

So that then brings us to the next question, [00:20:03] which is in the book of Acts, the apostles pray, praise, and give thanks to God, or the Lord our God.

Why didn't they ever address God as Father?

Well, we could not go through the book of Acts and look at all the prayers, but when it says that the Christians addressed God, for instance, when Peter was in prison, it says prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. It doesn't say how they addressed God. They prayed unto God.

But they may have prayed unto him, O God, or they may have prayed unto him, O God, our Father. It's not specifically recorded. There is one instance where in Acts 4.24, there was a special prayer meeting. When the apostles were let go and reported to their own country, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord [00:21:02] and said, Lord.

Now, this is a special word here.

If you have an accurate literal translation that gives footnotes, you may be able to see here something of this significance. It's as a master to slaves, as one having sovereign power. It's used in Jude also and in 2 Peter.

And it's the idea of sovereign Lord.

And it was to do with the way really the religious authorities, even the political authorities were arranging themselves. Quotes from Sam 2 and the heathen rage and so on and what is going on.

Now, Lord, behold their threatenings. And God then intervenes in power.

Now, that's something that we might consider [00:22:01] that God is our sovereign Lord.

And if we pray to him about some of these political events, sometimes it might be more effectual than casting a vote.

I remember hearing of a brother somewhere and they needed something from a local authority and he went along to one of the counselors and said, why should I do anything for you? You never vote for us. And the man said, oh, but we pray for you. I think the man never even realized anyone ever prayed for him in his life before. And not only was it in accordance with the word of God, but it was a testimony that caused this man to reflect. So there are various ways in which God is addressed in the book of Acts. And Peter, when the sheet was left down, he spoke to the Lord about it. Not so Lord, that was the Lord Jesus. And when Stephen was stoned, he said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. So there are prayers to God.

There are prayers to the Lord Jesus in the Acts. I would propose that Acts is a history book. [00:23:03] If you read Acts, you think Paul spent all this time preaching. If you read Paul's epistles, you think he spends all this time praying. And the book of Acts is also a transitional book, leading out of Judaism into Christianity. First the Jews, then the Samaritans, the house of Cornelius, then the disciples of John the Baptist. And the center of testimony is moving away from Jerusalem. It's moving west. It's moving to eventually to Rome. It finds Paul in prison in Rome.

So the place to look into how God should be addressed in prayer would be perhaps the epistles.

And we have two prayers in Ephesians chapter one and chapter three.

In Ephesians chapter one, Paul in his address to God, he says, let the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory. He's praying to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory. And then in chapter three, verse 14, [00:24:02] he says, for this cause I bow on the knees unto the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we need to search the scriptures and we need to look into Paul's epistles, particularly as the one who was preeminently the apostle of the assembly to find how we might be intelligent in our address to God.

And there's a lot of instructions from it. For instance, in the book of Hebrews, the father isn't mentioned. In Hebrews, it's God.

It's approach to God.

And our access and our ability to draw near.

But that doesn't mean that we set aside the idea that we approach God as father and address him as father. So we have to take the balance of the scriptures in regard to that.

How are we doing for time?

One minute.

I think that's going to be impossible, but we'll try to be very brief. [00:25:01] When should we pray to God our father and when shall we pray to the Lord Jesus?

Simple answer.

It's a matter of spiritual intelligence. Search the scriptures.

Christopher Willis was in a prison camp, in the Japanese internment camp, and the food supply ran out.

And he was the man in Hong Kong who made all these colorful illuminated texts.

And he got some scrolls and he got a pen and he inscribed one, Give us this day our daily bread.

The Roman Catholic priest didn't want it, but the Jewish rabbi said it's in keeping with the Old Testament.

They were allowed to put it up.

And mysteriously, miraculously, [00:26:01] all of a sudden the food supply started again.

That was an acknowledgment of God, a public acknowledgment of God. God answered it.

Then the theater company wanted to put on a stage play and they didn't think that having a text above the stage was very appropriate for their production. They took this text down and threw it in a corner. The food supply ran out again.

And there was no more food. And the Japanese weren't very kind in what they did to their prisoners until there was so much consternation and murmuring in the camp that they said put the text up again. The text went up again.

The food supply started again. So that's a wonderful testimony to God's goodness and to Christopher Willis' faith. You can read about it in his book, I Was Amongst the Captives. But the Lord's Prayer, it's given in its context to the disciples.

You can learn many, many practical things from it. [00:27:02] In Matthew 6, verse 31, take no thought saying what shall we eat, what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed. All these things the Gentiles seek. Your heavenly Father knoweth that you've need of these things. In regard to the detail of daily life, in regard to food, in regard to drink, in regard to everyday things, we can go to the Father because he cares about us in regard to such matters. That we have in the presentation of God the Father in the Synoptic Gospels. There are things, therefore, that we can go to the Father about. I can remember being in a home in Jamaica and we were visiting a widow and obviously in the principles of headship she asked a young brother who was also present to give thanks for the food. This widow, she said to me afterwards, will you please speak to him, please try to say something to him because

in actual fact [00:28:02] he addressed the Lord Jesus in giving thanks for the food and not God the Father, which was something that this sister, and she was an intelligent and well-taught sister, she thought it was in the realm of the Father's care. So there are suggestions like that in regard to things that concern specifically the assembly. The Lord is the head of the assembly and we speak to him about it. He's the Lord of the harvest. In regard to serving the Lord, we go to the Lord of the harvest. When we come together on a Lord's Day morning, the Lord has said, do this in remembrance of me. We sing hymns to the Lord Jesus. We've come together to remember him. He's prominently before our minds and hearts. Surely it's an appropriate occasion that we should directly address the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many instances in the New Testament where believers individually and in a collective capacity bow before the Lord Jesus. There are other occasions where they speak to the Father, such as in regard to daily needs. In the Synoptic Gospels, that's the presentation of the Father. In John's Gospel and in Paul's teaching, [00:29:02] we're entering the realm of spiritual privilege. And there, in regard to heavenly things and spiritual privilege, it's appropriate to approach the Father and speak to the Father. Rise our hearts and bless the Father. And the Lord Jesus takes his place in the midst of the company. He says, in the midst of the assembly will I sing praise unto thee. That surely is to God the Father. So I say these questions are matters for spiritual intelligence. There's no specific, there's no easy answer, but they're good questions. Search the Scriptures.

Not listen to what I say, but what the Word of God says. And even Paul himself, he said, consider what I say.

That's the Scriptures, apostolic teaching. Consider what I say.

We can consider it. And we've been doing a lot of considering here. But we need to get one step further. He says, consider what I say, and the Lord give, [00:30:01] and the Lord, if you read it literally, and it's not so much a petition that he might, but it's a conclusion that he will, and the Lord will give you understanding in all things. As we consider divine teaching, apostolic teaching, the Lord will then give us the understanding, the necessary understanding.