

# Following the Biblical Stream:

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## Part II

When we look at the story of the Bible, in the light that Christian theologians do, we find that they break the story down into dispensations. These are sections of time separated by major events such as: the fall of man and the death of Christ. They will tell you that man started in a dispensation of innocence. This being before Adam and Eve took of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then they will tell you that we moved into a dispensation of conscience. They will go on to tell you that when God established the nation of Israel, He put us in a dispensation of law. Finally, they will say that at the time of Jesus, we entered a dispensation of grace. Now, these terms are not altogether wrong, but they are misleading for many people. One of the biggest problems with this terminology is the fact that many are looking at the story of salvation all wrong! To many, the titles given to these dispensations are descriptive of how men were to go about finding God and salvation for their souls.

We start with the dispensation of innocence. Why is it called that? Because, in the garden, man did not yet have the knowledge of good and evil. Like a child, we were not responsible for that knowledge; therefore, we could not fall short of the glory of God; (Rom. 3:23, James 4:17) therefore, we did not need a Saviour. When we chose to take of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, we became responsible; we fell short of God's glory, and therefore, needed a Saviour! The following dispensations were also titled to reflect what many see as how God worked with us during specific time periods. Based on that idea, many go on to believe that in the dispensation of conscience, it was up to men to simply figure out, all by themselves, how to live before God. Only people like Noah, somehow figured it out, and pleased God. It really is to believe that God was looking at who could learn how to be a "good person." This may be the worst of the ideas. Noah's righteousness, no matter how great it was, was still as filthy rags. (Isa.

64:6) It was Noah's faith that pleased God, and faith is why Noah was willing to build an ark!

As we move on to the dispensation of law, I have to say there are large groups of people who believe, teach, and write their doctrine around wrong ideas about this one! Many believe that during the dispensation of law, people were saved by following the law. They believe the only people accepted by God were those who followed the law: mainly, those of the Jewish race, and the few who came in to be a part of the Jewish nation! Many churches teach that until the time of Jesus, all Gentiles who did not come and practice the Law of Moses, died in their sin and were lost for eternity. They teach that Jesus came to open salvation to all the world, free from having to follow the law! These ideas are simply untrue, and these untruths cause many false doctrines to arise!

These things are why there is so much confusion about saying, we live in a dispensation of grace at our present time! People have a hard time understanding why people just on the other side of Christ needed to sacrifice animals for salvation, and now we simply ask for it! People can go to church all their lives and never understand this teaching, and there is a good reason - it's wrong! I know many believe the animal sacrifices did not save people, but they do feel as though these sacrifices sort of swept the sin under the rug until Jesus could come and perform a lasting, perfect sacrifice. We need to understand that faith without works is dead; (James 2:17) but salvation never has come through our actions! It comes by the shed blood of Jesus Christ! The thing we must come to understand is, since the fall until now, salvation has always been through faith! (Eph. 2:8) Faith, not in our ability to "be good," or in our ability to follow a law, (Rom. 3:20) but always in the fact that God Himself would provide a Lamb. Since the death and resurrection of Christ, the only real difference in the basis of salvation is we believe God Himself has provided a Lamb, in the man Jesus Christ!

The Garden of Eden was not just a dispensation of innocence; it was a time of perfection. God had a perfect plan, and He put that plan into motion during creation. If you want the most basic description of sin, it is, disobedience to God. Sin is disobedience to the plan that God had for us from the beginning. Man was given a free will, and he was given a choice. Eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was a choice they could make, but one that God had instructed them - not to do! Why? Because, once man had this knowledge, he would be responsible for it. God knew if they became responsible, they would fall short of His perfection. This would cause separation from God; and because God is a loving God, He would remove man from the Tree of Life. (Gen. 3:24) Remember, He warned them this would happen. (Gen. 2:17) This left them in a situation where they could not stay on this earth, but they did not have the power to build a place where they could go after the death of their physical form. The end result is that man needs someone who can save him from this predicament! God, being a God of love, also was not willing that any should perish but that all would come to a place of repentance! (II Pet. 3:9) So, God put into place a plan that would be able to save everyone from Adam and Eve to the very last child to ever be conceived. Then, He again simply gave man the choice, follow God or go his own way. Jesus said, there would be few that would choose to follow God. (Matt. 7:14) This is the foundation of the story.

What God would do, after the fall of man, would not be to change His plan of salvation over and over again; but He would work amongst men in an attempt to get them to see and accept this plan of salvation! There are no changing dispensations of how man must come to God, only a continuing building of things that would help man find that one and only way to God. This is the explanation of the scripture that says, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:" Romans 5:20 As sinful man fell further and further away from God's saving plan, God continued to implement things that would give all men the chance to find Him. The destructive force of sin would never be able to cut man off from the love of God. (Rom. 8:38-39) As

long as man lived on this planet, he would always have the chance and the ability to turn from his own way and give his life to God. (Matt. 10:39) God would not force man or violate man's free will! However, God would always be reaching out in the hope that man would take His hand, and come back to that perfect plan God created, "In the beginning"!

Now, what we are talking about is pretty deep stuff, and I know we can't understand it all in one short article; but that is why we must go through the Bible. We must take all scripture together, putting each piece in its proper place and realizing there is a place for each piece. No contradictions, just the story of God's love in action! So, live in God's love, and I'll see you next time!

