



A BETTER WAY TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

Session 1

THE DISPENSATION OF INNOCENCE

Many in our world today who profess to be devoted followers of Jesus, insist that the Bible can be understood in many ways, and that no one way of interpretation is right. They say what the Bible means to you personally is what's most important, regardless of what someone else might think or believe. What is true for you may not be true for someone else, and vice-versa.

This kind of shallow thinking leads to chaotic belief and great confusion in ever understanding the Bible.

The apostle Paul makes it clear how we are to approach the Scriptures. In 2 Timothy 2:15 he writes,

*“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word if truth.**”*

Thankfully, there is a better and more satisfying way to understand the Bible. This way or principle is that when the writer wrote, he had something specific in mind. This fundamental principle of understanding the Bible is what is known as *literal interpretation*. That means when you read the Bible you use normal rules of grammar and the universally accepted meanings of words as expressed by the writer. In other words, unless the writer indicates otherwise, we take him at his word. Another way of saying this is,

“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.”

A term that is used for this principle of Biblical interpretation is *Dispensationalism*. A dispensation is a period of time. What this means is that while God never changes, over the course of time, the way he relates to humanity has changed. Therefore, dispensationalism is the belief that God has related to people in the course of human history in unique ways. Each of these unique historical relationships between God and people is called a *dispensation*.

Generally speaking there are seven dispensations.

	Innocence	Conscience	Government	Promise	Law	Grace	Kingdom
Scripture	Genesis 1-3	Genesis 4-8	Genesis 9-11	Genesis 12 - Exodus 18	Exodus 19 - Acts 1	Acts 1 - Revelation 19	Revelation 20
Duration	From the creation of Adam to his fall.						
The Responsibility Before God	Fill and steward the earth; do not eat from the tree.						
The Judgment From God	Separation from God						

Over the next couple of months we will look at these seven dispensations in order to better understand how to “rightly divide the word of truth.”

Today we turn our attention to Genesis, chapters 1 - 3 and the dispensation of Innocence.

How it all began.

- Genesis 2:25, the first man and the first woman (Adam and Eve) were initially both naked and were not ashamed by their nakedness. They were in a state of innocence.
- The dispensation of innocence refers to that initial period of human history when humanity existed in a non-sinful state as created by God (Genesis 1:31; See also, Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25)
- Adam and Eve were sinless; their physical nakedness was symbolic of their moral and spiritual innocence.
- Since people no longer run around naked anymore, something changed.

The Original Plan.

As you look at the chart above you will discover over the course of this class that each dispensation is characterized by a unique relationship between God and humanity. That relationship includes a specific human **responsibility** before God.

So what was the responsibility of Adam and Eve before God? Two **general responsibilities** (Genesis 1:28):

1. Procreation (producing children).
2. Stewardship (caring for God’s creation).

But also, Adam and Eve were given **individual responsibilities**.

1. Eve was to be helper (Genesis 2:18).
 - Helper is not a demeaning term.
 - Psalm 33:20 (Hebrew, ezer). It carries the sense of dignity and honor. Recall the name Eliezer (Genesis 15:2).

2. Adam was to provide leadership.
 - God gave to the man the responsibility to lead his family as the head of the household (Ephesians 5:22-31; 1 Peter 3:1-7).
 - Husbands are to "love their own wives as their own bodies" and "even as Christ also loved the church..."
 - This kind of love encourages a wife's submission.

Unfortunately, because of sin, today the differences in the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives often lead to conflict. This will be clearly seen as we look at the next dispensation.

Adam Failed in His Role.

1. God gave Adam only one prohibition (Genesis 2:17).

The Devil Enters the Scene.

- Disguised himself as a serpent and "deceived" (Genesis 3:13; 1 Timothy 2:14) Eve into partaking of the forbidden fruit (vv. 2-6a).
- Adam was with her (Genesis 3:6).
 - He never spoke up. He never interrupted the conversation to warn Eve of the consequences of what she was being tempted to do. He was passive.

Each dispensation, as we will see, is characterized by failure.

In this case, "As by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Romans 5:12.

Eyes Wide Open.

- Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned against God, "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." (Genesis 3:7). In other words, they covered their front sides.
- Their innocence was gone. They now knew firsthand what good and evil were all about.

God's Warning.

- Genesis 2:17.
- However, they did not die physically, at least not right away. In fact, Genesis 5:5 says Adam lived to be 930 years old. So, does this mean God failed to fulfill his warning?
- Eventually they both died physically, but immediately they died spiritually.
- The state of every human being since Adam and Eve: Ephesians 2:1-3.
- The state of creation since Adam and Eve: Romans 8:20, 22).

Ironically, humanity—created to be the ruler over all creation (Genesis 1:26-28) has now become, in some sense, subservient to the created realm.

Where Does this Leave us Today?

- No one is born innocent.
- God provided hope (Genesis 3:15).
- God temporarily provided for the guilt of Adam and Eve by taking away their flimsy fig aprons and replaced them with full coverings of animal skins (Genesis 3:21).
 - The principle was established that forgiveness of human sin must be secured through the death of an innocent substitute in order to satisfy the justice of God.
- Ultimately, it was the sacrifice of Jesus, called the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29), that secured the basis of the forgiveness and potential salvation of all humanity (1 John 2:2; 4:14)
- Receiving that forgiveness and salvation is conditioned upon faith in Jesus (Romans 3:23-25).

Why Am I Suffering For Adam's Mistake?

- In God's providence and wisdom, Adam perfectly represented us. His decisions and actions represented the entire human race (Romans 5:12-21).
- As a result, we are all born into this world spiritually separated from God.
- Prior to faith in Christ we are enemies of God. Rebellious!

The Good News!

- God loves his enemies!
 - Romans 5:8,10.

The Bottom Line.

Was it fair that one man, Jesus Christ, a wholly innocent man at that, suffered for all of mankind? No, it was not fair. In fact, it was the height of injustice. But Christ's death on our behalf was also the most amazing demonstration of God's love and grace. So you have to decide what you want: fairness or grace?