

D & A 4 - Dispensation of Conscience - a study for the Bible Institute at Gulf Coast Baptist Church Spring 2023 by Steve Thomas

Master - The Master of this dispensation is the Father. We see God's instructions to the steward. He spoke to the firstborn as the one responsible for the family. God provided the means for the individuals to obey, as we will see several in this dispensation did just that. He sent his Spirit to strive with mankind to keep them better than they would otherwise be. (Gen 6:3) He ceased this and gave them over to their desires. (Rom 1:24-28)

Steward - the steward of this dispensation was Cain. Gen 3:23, 4:1, 2, 7, 9, 12 God gave instruction to Cain and when he failed, gave him further instruction. God asked man to approach him by sacrifice. We can deduce through the coats of skins that God made Adam and Eve that he asked for a blood sacrifice. This was how man was to approach God. Hebrews 11: 4 tells us that Abel's sacrifice was a more excellent one than Cain's. Cain's was therefore lacking character. 1 John 3:10-11 tells us that Cain's works were a ponerous evil. God had provided Cain a sin offering (4:7 "crouching" is used of livestock lying down) to correct the problem with his sacrifice This was the part that was lacking character, Cain's response to this (murder) was ponerous evil. It was as if he was saying you want a sin offering, I will give you one. The term for slay is to slice the throat, it is used in Rev for the lamb that was slain.

Household - The household was the entire human race. The phrase 4:3 in the process of time, tells us that a good bit of time had passed. We probably have a good population of people at this time. 4:14 (everyone that finds me shall slay me). This is one of the dispensations that contained both saved and unsaved people. This reminds us that a rule of life is not a means to initial salvation. It is a way to enjoy the provisions that God makes available to them.

Rule of Life/Test - The first test for the steward was to approach God with a sacrifice. This was not followed by the majority of the household. We see few that have the favor of God that was obtained by obedience. Abel, Enoch, Noah are examples of those who had this favor. We see that during this dispensation, man's thoughts were only evil continually. (Gen 6:5). Cain's second mandate was to wander and be a vagabond. Instead he built cities and this became the beginning of the World System. (Gen 4:16-17 and Luke 11:50-51). This curse was for Cain alone.

What did God give man to guide him during this time? God tested man's use of the conscience during this dispensation. He was to continue to work the earth and bring sacrifice to approach God. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were "good" content and happy. There was no conflict. Now they knew calamity, lack of happiness, contentment, and well being. Conscience entered in at this point. It is the balance of one's knowledge with his or another's conduct. The conscience is like a set of scales. As long as the behavior is in line with the knowledge of the individual, the scales are balanced, if there is a conflict, it can be the result of a disconnect between these things or a bad conscience.

Dispensation of Conscience

There are several things that can create a bad conscience. Our conscience is shaped by our community since the day we are born. Parents, friends, media, etc all shape the knowledge of behavior that is acceptable. A study of Sociology or a glance through National Geographic will tell us that this varies greatly in differing cultures. The absence of Illumination of the Spirit or teaching from the Word of God can warp a conscience. Contradicting information from differing sources can warp a conscience. We see these issues played out with how things once frowned upon by society are now deemed acceptable or even desirable.

Conscience can accuse or excuse behavior. Rom 2:15. The law written in man's hearts is not inborn moral principle, this would contradict what Scriptures teach us about man's fallen state. If someone is bound by the need to provide for his family, he conscience may lead him to steal to meet that need. Sometimes another's behavior is unbalanced compared to your knowledge, this causes your conscience to accuse that behavior.

The conscience is a connection between the knowledge of an individual and the actions. When the two are in conflict, the conscience is troubled. When they are in concert, the conscience is calm. Many will confuse this with Holy Spirit conviction. Scripture tells us that the Spirit convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement (John 16:8-11). The Spirit will teach the believer (John 14:26). It is possible to have a good, pure, or bad conscience (Acts 23:1, 24:15, Rom 2:15, Titus 1:5). It is possible to have a strong, weak, or seared conscience (1 Cor 8:7,10,12). The believer should not be bound by conscience but walk by the Spirit. The good conscience is having the knowledge in accordance with the utterances of God, the conscience is purged (Heb 9:14).

This time period was a time of great evil. The system started by Cain has always been the enemy of God, and it still is (John 7:7). The behavior was abhorrent to God (Gen 6:2-4). This passage connected with Numbers 13:33, 2 Peter 2:4, 1 Peter 3:19-20, referencing Job 1:6 lead us to believe that angels were co-habiting with the daughters of men to create the Nephilim. Literally "fallen ones". Mankind rather than regarding God with respect and honor gave their honor and respect to these beings. Rather than seeking God as Enoch did, they respected these fallen beings. Noah was righteous and perfect. Perfect meaning complete, not marred or broken. He had no corruption in his lineage, no taint in his activity. None of this behavior was the basis for their salvation but was how God dealt with them as believers. Salvation has always been by grace through faith based on the crosswork of Christ.

God judged all but 8 humans and most of the animal life. Conscience did not make a good guide, it still does not. We should be concerned with having a good conscience, but it should not be our guide for it cannot be trusted. Rom 9:1, 2 Cor 1:12, 1 Tim 1:19-20 lead us to believe that we should not allow a socially- oriented conscience to guide us. Even with some revelation to guide it.

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Conclusion

When man seeks to live by his conscience, his enemies will ultimately cause him to fail. Cain's "perversity" or his sin nature was too strong for him to control. This was a difficult lesson to learn. Mankind has been struggling with this same lesson throughout time.