



V. THE DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE (Romans 2:12-15)

A. Foundational Information on the Conscience

1. The conscience defined (1 Corinthians 8:7)
 - a. The word *conscience* is a compound word made up of the root word *science* and the prefix *con*.
 - b. The prefix *con* means *with* while the root word *science* means *knowledge*.
 - c. In 1 Corinthians 8:7 and 1 Corinthians 8:10, the word *conscience* is used in conjunction with the mention of knowledge possessed by men.
 - d. Romans 2:15 makes a similar connection by joining the word *conscience* with the statement that something is written in the heart.
 - e. As such, God designed a man's conscience as an internal tool to place pure and righteous knowledge within an individual that he would otherwise lack.
2. The purpose of the conscience
 - a. To give knowledge of the existence of God (Romans 1:19)
 - (1) The nature of the knowledge—"that which may be known of God"
 - (2) The location of the knowledge—"is manifest in them"
 - (3) The giver of the knowledge—"for God hath shewed it unto them"
 - b. To give knowledge of evil actions (John 8:9; Romans 2:15)
 - (1) It is extremely important for everyone to have a functioning conscience.
 - (2) According to Romans 2:15, the conscience works in man to either accuse or else excuse his thoughts.
 - (3) A man's thoughts further affect his actions. The more often a conscience is ignored, the sooner it loses its capability to work upon man.
 - (4) The same holds true for any conscience defiled by sin.
 - a) In John chapter 8, as the Lord dealt with the scribes and Pharisees, the desired inner workings of the conscience can be seen.
 - b) In this instance, the religious leaders brought a woman before the Lord, accusing her of sin.
 - c) In response, the Saviour suggested that he that was without sin should be the first to cast a stone in judgment.
 - d) One by one the consciences of the religious leaders convicted them as they turned and walked away.
 - c. To give knowledge of right actions (Romans 9:1); As referenced above, a man's conscience can either accuse (give knowledge of evil actions) or excuse (give knowledge of right or acceptable actions) his thoughts, words, or deeds.



3. The need for a redeemed conscience (Hebrews 9:8-9, 14; Hebrews 10:1-3, 22)
 - a. Sin within a person's life messes with his conscience.
 - b. Sin attacks man's knowledge of God with the end goal of causing a complete rejection of God.
 - c. Sinful man turns to many different devices in hopes of taking care of his sin-tainted conscience.
 - (1) Religious works
 - (2) The pleasures of sin
 - (3) In either case, man is left with a conscience in need of purging.
4. The operation of a good conscience (Acts 23:1; Acts 24:16; 1 Timothy 1:5, 19; 1 Peter 2:19; 1 Peter 3:16, 21; cp. Hebrews 5:14)
 - a. The apostle Paul exercised himself to ensure that his conscience was void of offence toward both God and other men (Acts 24:16). In fact, it was one of his chief concerns to serve God with a good or a pure conscience (1 Timothy 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:3).
 - b. A good conscience was a key component of Paul's charge to young Timothy (1 Timothy 1:18-19).
 - c. It was also part of Peter's admonition to the believers to whom he wrote (1 Peter 3:16).
5. The failure of the human conscience
 - a. A weak conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7-12)
 - (1) A man's conscience is likened to a muscle.
 - a) When a man *exercises* his conscience, it becomes strong and increasingly useful. It can protect when the enemy attacks and keep that man from being taken captive.
 - b) When the conscience is ignored, it deteriorates and becomes weak and less dependable.
 - (2) The apostle Paul warned the believers at Corinth about defiling the weak conscience of others who might not be as strong in the faith. It was so important that they were to be willing to refuse to eat meat, a perfectly acceptable food, if eating it meant someone else's conscience was going to be harmed.
 - (3) Paul further warned that damaging someone's conscience was to sin against that brother.
 - b. A defiled conscience (Titus 1:15)
 - (1) A defiled conscience is the opposite of a pure conscience, or one protected from the evils of unbelief.
 - (2) A man's conscience is tied directly to his heart, mind, and soul.
 - c. A seared conscience (1 Timothy 4:2)
 - (1) As men depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, their consciences become so weak that they show very little sign of life.
 - (2) The Bible describes it as a searing of their consciences with a hot iron. Initially, there is great pain in the sin and the conscience feels the pain. Yet, eventually, the conscience becomes so seared that it is numb. At that point, the conscience



loses its ability to warn the believer of sin. It further loses the ability to get the believer's attention when he is on the verge of danger. Eventually, men speak lies in hypocrisy and do not care or feel any remorse for their wickedness.

B. The Contents of the Dispensation

1. The bookmark events
 - a. The beginning: the fall of man
 - b. The end: the flood
2. The passage covered (Genesis 4:1-26; Genesis 5:1-32; Genesis 6:1-22; Genesis 7:1-24; Genesis 8:1-22)
3. The time period spanned: 1,656 years based upon Genesis 5; Note: The dispensation of conscience covered more than 1,600 years. Yet, the apostle Paul in his church age epistles placed greater emphasis upon conscience than all of the other combined scriptures. In fact, the apostle Paul mentioned the word *conscience* or *consciences* twenty-six times in his epistles while the Old Testament books make no mention of it by name. Although God does not deal with man today exclusively through his conscience, the conscience remains vitally important.

C. The Conditions of the Dispensation

1. A fallen world (Genesis 3:17); Specifically, this verse speaks of the fallen nature of the earth, but the Bible also indicates that all of creation was hurled into the bondage of corruption and is presently awaiting "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:19-23).
2. The loss of innocence (Genesis 3:22)
3. A sinful nature (Genesis 4:1-10; John 6:63; Romans 7:18; Galatians 5:17)
4. Loss of God's presence (Genesis 3:24; Genesis 4:16)
5. The beginning of prayer (Genesis 4:26); It would appear that man's fellowship with God shifted drastically in this period. Man spoke to God through prayer and God spoke to man through man's conscience.
6. Death (Genesis 4:8; Genesis 5:5; Romans 5:12, 14)

D. The Commission of the Dispensation

1. First commission remained in effect (Genesis 1:27-28); This is a truth often overlooked in the study of dispensations. Rarely do dispensations end without at least some elements continuing.
2. To the woman (Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9; 1 Timothy 2:11-15)
 - a. Sorrow in conception
 - b. Subjection to her husband
3. To the man (Genesis 3:17-19)
 - a. Sorrow in his service (Genesis 3:17)
 - b. Sweat in his service (Genesis 3:19)

**E. The Covenant of the Dispensation**

1. Man was to make animal sacrifices to ensure proper fellowship (Genesis 3:21; Genesis 4:3-5). Note: Much has been argued regarding whether or not Cain and Abel knew what to offer. The answer is found in Hebrews 11:4 where the Bible says, "By faith Abel offered." Compare that with Romans 10:17.
2. Men were to follow their consciences (Romans 2:12-15; Acts 17:30).
3. Provision was made for men to walk with God (Genesis 5:24; Genesis 6:9).
4. Note: We are told very little about the spiritual economy of this dispensation. Therefore, we should be careful in making too much of speculation. God knew how to reach the people of this time.

F. The Crisis of the Dispensation

1. Men had wicked imaginations (Genesis 6:5; see Genesis 8:21).
2. The earth was filled with violence (Genesis 6:11-13).
3. The generations of men were defiled (Genesis 6:1-4, 9; see 2 Peter 2:4-5; Jude 1:6-7).
 - a. The identity of the sons of God
 - (1) Angels (Job 1:6; Job 2:1; Job 38:7)
 - (2) Adam (Luke 3:38)
 - (3) Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1)
 - (4) The saved (John 1:12; Romans 8:14, 19; Philippians 2:15; 1 John 3:1-2)
 - b. The sin of the sons of God
 - (1) They saw the beauty of the daughters of men (Genesis 6:2).
 - (2) They took wives of all which they chose (Genesis 6:2).
 - (3) Notice the words "even as" in Jude 1:7. Those words connect the sin of the angels to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrha. Part of their sin was going after strange flesh.
 - a) In Sodom and Gomorrha, sodomy was a problem.
 - b) In Sodom and Gomorrha, the men of the city were after the angels (Genesis 19:4-5).
 - c. The fruit of this sin
 - (1) The offspring were called giants (Genesis 6:4).
 - (2) The Anakims are later called giants (Numbers 13:33; Deuteronomy 2:10-11).
 - (3) Zamzummims are later called giants (Deuteronomy 2:20-21).
 - (4) Og the king of Bashan was called a giant (Deuteronomy 3:11-13; Joshua 12:4; Joshua 13:12).
 - (5) A giant in Gath had five sons (2 Samuel 21:16-22).
 - a) Ishbibenob (2 Samuel 21:16)
 - b) Saph (2 Samuel 21:18)
 - c) The brother of Goliath (2 Samuel 21:19)
 - d) This identifies Goliath as one (2 Samuel 21:19).



- e) The man with twelve fingers and twelve toes (2 Samuel 21:20)
- f) This explains the gathering of five stones by David (1 Samuel 17:40).
- d. The angels are awaiting judgment.
 - (1) They are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness (Jude 1:6).
 - a) They were placed there by the Lord (2 Peter 2:4).
 - b) The location of their imprisonment is in hell (2 Peter 2:4).
 - c) They are the spirits in prison to whom the Lord preached.
 - i) The Lord Jesus went to hell immediately after dying on the cross (Acts 2:25, 27, 31).
 - ii) Hell is distinguished from paradise.
 - (a) It is a place of torment clearly distinguished from the abode of the Old Testament saints (Luke 16:22-23, 28).
 - (b) Throughout the Bible, hell is consistently a place of eternal, fiery judgment for the damned.
 - iii) Christ suffered our hell, but not in hell.
 - (a) The suffering of His soul satisfied the wrath of God (Isaiah 53:10-11).
 - (b) All references to His payment for sin point to the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 3:18).
 - iv) If Christ did not suffer in hell, why did He go there?
 - (a) He bore our sins (Hebrews 9:26-28).
 - (b) He preached to disobedient spirits (1 Peter 3:18-20).
 - (c) He took the keys of death and hell (Revelation 1:18; Hebrews 2:14-15).
 - (d) He conquered death by passing through it victorious: the same with hell.
 - (e) He moved quickly to paradise.
 - (i) The Lord Jesus promised the thief that he would see Him “To day” (Luke 23:43).
 - (ii) The Lord gave up the ghost about the ninth hour (Matthew 27:46-50).
 - (iii) Regardless of whether this is Roman or Hebrew time, the Lord still would have had time to go to hell and make it to paradise to keep His promise to the thief.
 - (f) He ascended with the Old Testament saints (Ephesians 4:8-10).
 - (g) Hell enlarged herself (Isaiah 5:14).
 - v) The Lord Jesus preached to spirits while He was there (1 Peter 3:18-20). Notice the time given for when these spirits were disobedient (1 Peter 3:20).



- vi) This could not have been people. This can be seen in what happens to a person when they die.
 - (a) First, it is important to realize that man is made up of three parts (1 Thessalonians 5:23).
 - (b) Secondly, it is important to realize what happens when a man dies (Genesis 35:18; Genesis 25:8).
 - (i) *The body*—yields to corruption for the saved or lost
 - (ii) *The soul*—depends upon salvation; the saved with the Lord in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8; Revelation 6:9; Revelation 20:4) and the lost in hell (Luke 16:19-31)
 - (iii) *The spirit* – returns to God who gave it regardless of saved or lost (Ecclesiastes 3:21; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Numbers 16:22; Numbers 27:16)
 - (c) With this being the case, lost people in hell would have been noted as souls, the only spirits that could be in hell would have been evil spirits.
- (2) They are reserved unto the judgment of the great day.
- 4. Note: Since God declared that He would defeat the Devil through the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), Satan has tried to destroy that seed. His methods have included:
 - a. Attempts to destroy a specific person
 - b. Attempts to destroy the entire Jewish race
 - c. Attempts to dilute the generations by intermarriage of some sort
- 5. Here are some of Satan's attempts:
 - a. Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4:8).
 - b. Defiled generations (Genesis 6:9)
 - c. Shechem (Genesis 34:20-21)
 - d. Intermarriage (Ezra 10:1-3, 10-11)
 - e. Attempt to kill baby Jesus (Matthew 2:16-18)

G. The Condemnation of the Dispensation

- 1. God was grieved at His creation of man (Genesis 6:6).
- 2. God determined to destroy man and beast with a flood (Genesis 6:7, 13).

H. The Compassion of the Dispensation

- 1. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8; Genesis 7:1).
- 2. God had Noah build an ark (Genesis 6:14-22; 1 Peter 3:20-21).

I. The Change of the Dispensation

- 1. Transitional man—Noah (Genesis 5:32; Genesis 7:11; Genesis 9:28-29)
- 2. New world after the flood (Genesis 7:23; 2 Peter 2:5)