

LESSON -3

DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE

References : Gensis.3 :1 - 8 :14

Memory verse : Romans.1 : 20 -21

Objective : We may understand that we can neither please God nor become good by the knowledge of good and evil or by the guidance of conscience.

Introduction : Is not the knowledge of good and evil desirable? Yes. But can man live acceptably with that knowledge? What about the evil doers in the whole world? Do all of them do evil because they lack knowledge? What is your opinion?

THE DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE :

This is the period from the fall of man to the flood about 1650 years. Man ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil violating God's commandment. Subsequently, his conscience became active. In other words, man got the knowledge to distinguish between good and evil. So this was a dispensation in which God gave the law of the conscience and tested man's choice of God's will for his life. But the events prove that man failed in that test too.

CAIN AND ABEL (GEN. 4 : 1- 16) ;

Good had given the fallen man a law of sacrifice with shedding of blood by which he could get right with God. This sacrifice was introduced as a shadow of the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Cain and Abel started out to offer sacrifice to the Lord by the guidance of their conscience. Abel offered a lamb as a sacrifice of blood. God was pleased with him and his sacrifice.

WHAT DID CAIN DO?

He overlooked the voice of the conscience that God gave and offered a sacrifice of his own will. God was not pleased in Cain and in his offering. Then, instead of returning to God's will by repentance, he was full of jealousy and hatred. Thus Cain killed Abel his own brother. In this way, at the very beginning of this dispensation, such evils as the worship against God's will, jealousy, hatred and murder entered into human life.

Cain's descendants went to build cities and introduced worldly systems being away from God's communion. They became experts in forging out tools, raising livestock, and making of musical instruments (Gen. 4:16-22).

Contrary to God's will, they began to take wives instead of one wife to one man (polygamy). It was Lamech who first introduced polygamy into the world (Gen. 4:19). So were the descendants of Cain sexual, ungodly, wicked and transgressors. Here we find that the man who obeyed was blessed and he who disobeyed was cursed.

God gave Adam another son named Seth. Seth worshipped the Lord (Gen. 4:26). The generations passed by. In the 7th generation another man named Enoch walked with God and pleased Him by faith (Gen. 5:24, Heb. 11:5). He was taken away by God without seeing death. But other descendants of Adam turned to the way of Cain. As a result, The earth was filled with wickedness. But Noah who lived in the 10th generation obeyed God and found God's favour.

THE DISPENSATION ENDS : (GEN. 6 : 1 -8)

Towards the end of the dispensation of conscience, man's sin and wickedness reached enormous proportions. The human character became so low that they had immoral relations with a group of fallen angels.

Note: The 'Sons of God' referred to in Genesis 6 : 2 are a group of corrupt angels. We see the use of such term for angels else where in the Old Testament (Job. 1:6, 2:1, 38 :7). Moreover, we can understand from the Old Testament that the angels are able to take human body and eat with men (Gen. 18: 1-8) Those who were born of them are called in the original language 'Nephilim' meaning "fallen ones". The angels who thus corrupted themselves and sinned have been chained and kept for final judgement (2 Pet. 2:4 -9, Jude : 6, 7). (There is disagreement among theologians about this view : hence not authoritative.)

PUNISHMENT - THE FLOOD (GEN. 6 :3 - 8 , 14)

Man had sufficient opportunities and privilege to live in the will of God. They had the knowledge of good and evil as well as the freedom of choice. Nevertheless, man took God for granted and indulged in the most horrible and shameful sinfulness. God was grieved in His heart about man. It led God to giving suitable punishment to that generation. But in the midst of that generation, Noah held communion with God by his conscience. So Noah received grace in the sight of God (Gen. 6:8). As instructed by God, Noah made a ship (Ark) of three decks, obeying God, Noah and his family entered into it and escaped from the destructive flood. Now, the ark is a type of Jesus Christ. Have you entered into the ark of salvation i. e. Jesus Christ? There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

It is not the knowledge of good and evil that enables man to live well and obtain God's favour. The grace of God alone saves us and empowers us to live for God. Let's trust on His grace!

EXERCISE - 3

Answer the following questions

1. Which period is called the 'age of conscience'? What are its characteristics?
2. When did man's conscience become active?
3. What was the will of God for the fallen man?
4. What did Cain's descendants do? Describe their spiritual and material condition?.
5. Who introduced polygamy in this world?

6. Who was the son born to Adam after the death of Abel?
7. What happened towards the end of this dispensation?
8. How were the people of this dispensation punished?
9. Who found grace in this dispensation and was saved with his family?
10. Who is our ark of salvation?
11. What enables us to live for God & obtain His favour?

