

Doctrine of a Dispensation

1. C.I. Scofield has made popular the concept that, "*A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.*" With this definition in mind Scofield divided up the Bible according to seven dispensations: Innocency, Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, Grace, and Kingdom.
2. W.E. Vine, who is not unsympathetic to Scofield's theology, correctly challenges Scofield's definition of a dispensation being a period of time as he writes that, "*A dispensation is not a period of epoch (a common, but erroneous, use of the word), but a mode of dealing, an arrangement or administration of affairs*" (***Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words***).
3. Strong's Dictionary provides additional information. *oikonomia* primarily signifies "the management of a household or of household affairs" (*oikos*, "a house," *nomos*, "a law"); then the management or administration of the property of others, and so "a stewardship," (Luke 16:2-4); elsewhere only in the epistles of Paul, who applies it
 - to the responsibility entrusted to him of preaching the gospel, (1 Cor. 9:17) (RV, "*stewardship*," KJV, "dispensation");
 - to the stewardship committed to him "*to fulfill the Word of God*," the fulfillment being the unfolding of the completion of the divinely arranged and imparted cycle of truths which are consummated in the truth relating to the church as the body of Christ, (Col. 1:25) (RV and KJV, "*dispensation*"); so in (Eph. 3:2), of the grace of God given him as a stewardship ("*dispensation*") in regard to the same "mystery";
 - in (Eph. 1:10) and (3:9), it is used of the arrangement or administration by God, by which in "*the fullness of the times*" (or seasons) God will sum up all things in the heavens and on earth in Christ. In (Eph. 3:9) some mss. have *koinonia*, "*fellowship*," for *oikonomia*, "*dispensation*." In (1 Tim. 1:4) *oikonomia* may mean either a stewardship in the sense of (a) above, or a "*dispensation*" in the sense of (c). The reading *oikodomia*, "*edifying*," in some mss., is not to be accepted.
4. The word "*dispensation*" is used only four times in the Authorized Version (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25).
5. According to Vine a dispensation (*oikonomia*) primarily signifies the management of a household or a household of affairs (*oikos*, a house; *nomos*, a law). The word came to refer to the management or administrative of the property of others, and so to a stewardship (cp. Luke 16:2,3,4; *oikonomos*, a steward; *oikonomeo*, to be a steward).
6. The apostle Paul used the word dispensation in 1 Corinthians 9:17 in the sense of having the responsibility or stewardship entrusted to him of preaching the gospel. The RV recognizes this concept and translates the word "*stewardship*."

7. In Colossians 1:25 the apostle feels the responsibility of the stewardship committed to *him* "to fulfill the Word of God." The fulfillment being the proclamation of the truths relating to the Church as the body of Christ.
8. Writing to the saints at Ephesus (Eph. 3:2) Paul speaks of how God gave to him as a stewardship (dispensation) the mystery of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.
9. In Ephesians 1:10 and 3:10 the word is used of the arrangement or administration by God, by which in "*the fullness of the times*" (or seasons) God will bring to a conclusion and sum up all things in heaven and on earth in Christ.
10. The English word dispensation translates the Greek *oikonomia* and occurs in the following passages:
 - *1 Cor 9:17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.*
 - *Eph 1:10 That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*
 - *Eph 3:2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:*
 - *Eph 3:9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery [i.e. oikonomia], which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:*
 - *Col 1:25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God;*
11. *Oikonomia* also occurs in the following passages where it is rendered stewardship:
 - *Luke 16:2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.*
 - *Luke 16:3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.*
 - *Luke 16:4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.*
12. In the best Greek texts of 1 Tim 1:4 the term is found: *Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying [i.e. oikodomen] which is in faith: so do.*