

Doctrine of Dispensation Defined

1. The English word dispensation translates the Greek word, *oikonomia*, and occurs in the following passages:
 - *1 Corinthians 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.*
 - *Ephesians 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:*
 - *Ephesians 3:2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:*
 - *Ephesians 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:*
 - *Colossians 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;*

2. *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.*

3. In the best Greek texts of 1 Timothy 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.*

4. Greek scholar W.E. Vine summarizes the meaning of the word "dispensation": *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 Corinthians 9:17*) (RV, "stewardship," "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 (Ephesians 3:2), of the grace of God given him as a stewardship ("dispensation") in regard to the same "mystery";
- in (Ephesians 1:10) and (Ephesians 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 (Ephesians 3:9) some Greek manuscripts have *koinonia*, "fellowship," for *oikonomia*, "dispensation." In (1 Tim. 1:4) *oikonomia* may mean either a stewardship, or a "dispensation".

Special Note.

A "dispensation" is not a period, or epoch, (a common, but erroneous, use of the word), but a mode of dealing, an arrangement or administration of affairs. cf. *oikonomos*, "a steward," and *oikonomeo*, "to be a steward." (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*)

4. Professor Charles Hodge points out the double use of the word with respect to one in authority, it means a plan or scheme, and with respect to one under authority, it means a stewardship or administration.
5. The theological interest of the term belongs to the plan or scheme of God in the outworking of redemption.
6. God's covenanted purpose with sinful man has always been one of grace; but the covenant of grace was based on a double plan, or, in the words of Holy Scripture, God's plan was revealed in two dispensations.
7. The first was the Mosaic dispensation, which can be called the "Old Covenant," and the second is the "New Covenant."
8. When Paul uses the word dispensation, he is speaking of the distinction between the way the grace of God was made known before the coming of Christ under the Old Covenant, and the way the grace of God is being manifested now that the redeeming work of Christ has been accomplished.
9. Under the Mosaic, or Old Covenant (dispensation), the gospel was presented in types, and shadows, in the form of priest, altar, sacrifice, tabernacle, and mercy seat.
10. Faith in these provisions of God's grace, which in turn expressed itself in conformity to the demands of his holy law, was the plan by which God prefigured the saving work of Christ, and also justified the penitent saints of OT times.

11. Under the New Covenant (dispensation) souls are saved by the redemptive work of Christ (Heb. 9:9, 12).