

Stewardship and Dispensations: The Significance of Οἰκονόμος and Οἰκονομία

by Luther Walker

The sixty-six books of the Bible span thousands of years of man's history and beyond. They begin before God created man and end with the creation of new heavens and a new earth where righteousness settles down and feels at ease¹. Within the pages of the Bible, we see changes in the relationship and expectation that God has for mankind and the failure of mankind to live up to God's expectation, which ultimately brings judgment. In the garden of Eden, man was not allowed to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil². Upon eating from the fruit of this tree, mankind's spirit was separated from God³, he became subject to physical death, and was expelled from the garden⁴. Having been expelled from the garden, the expectation for man was to properly govern the manner of his life by the knowledge of good and evil that he now possessed. However, again men failed and God judged the earth by bringing a flood⁵. After the flood, God instructs Noah that men are to govern themselves and capital punishment is implemented⁶. Again, men fail to follow God's instructions, rejected God, and sought their own way. Therefore, God brought judgment and forced man to separate and spread across the earth⁷. This judgment brought about multiple languages, and the division of the continents, which forced mankind to scatter. Having scattered man across the face of the earth, God then approaches Abram and ultimately offers him four covenants⁸. These covenants included a promise of land that Abraham and his descendants were to guard⁹. However, Abraham's descendants rejected God's way and

¹ 2 Peter 3:13

² Genesis 2:17 the tree was the knowledge of that which is beneficial and that which lacks in character

³ Romans 5:12-21

⁴ Genesis 3:1-24 God told Adam that if he ate of the tree, dying he would die.

⁵ Genesis 6:17

⁶ Genesis 9:1-7

⁷ Genesis 11:1-9; Romans 1:18-32

⁸ Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15:7-21; Genesis 17:1-14

⁹ In Genesis 17:5 God changed Abram's name to Abraham

judgment came yet again¹⁰. Rather than living by promise, now the children of Abraham had to live by law, which again ends in failure. Through the failure of those living under law, God brought about a new standard where those who are saved by faith through grace are to live by faith¹¹. Unfortunately, this will also end in failure and the last change in the expectation of mankind before God is seen in the millennial kingdom, where Christ will rule over the earth from the New Jerusalem¹².

With all of this information, how are we to know what to apply to our lives? What is the standard by which God expects us to live? Are we to apply all of the Scriptures to our lives, even though that produces conflict? In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul states that a workman is to rightly divide, or cut straight the Word of God. This dividing has to do with what is applied for practice and what is to be known, but not practiced. When it comes to the topic of rightly dividing Scripture, I could have looked at the different words for doctrine; however, I want to discuss not so much the specific doctrine by which we live, but how we identify the areas in Scripture that we apply to our lives as Christians to govern our actions. This is why I chose to look at how οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία are used in Scripture instead of the words for doctrine.

In order to understand why οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία have any significance in what part of Scripture we can apply to our Christian lives, or even why we would divide Scripture, we need to first look at what they mean and how they are used in Scripture. Then we can apply what we have learned to Scripture and understand not only how to divide Scripture properly, but also why we should divide it. Since we are looking at how οἰκονόμος is used in Scripture, we are going to also see two other areas that this word is used in which it has significance in our lives today, but does not relate to dividing Scripture. The first area is the likeness of a Pastor to a steward, and the second use is how we are to manage our Spiritual gift as stewards. We will begin with discussing what

¹⁰ Exodus 19:3-8 (The Israelites said " you keep telling us what to do and we will do it". They did not accept guarding the covenants of promise.

¹¹ Romans 6:14, 15; Galatians 2:21; Romans 1:17 the just will live out from faith. Hebrews 11:1 – faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of accomplished deeds not seen.

¹² Revelation 20:6 (The church will reign with Christ); Matthew 5, 6, 7 the rules for those who will live in the millennial kingdom – not for the Church

οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία mean and their application to scripture and dividing Scripture properly . Then we will discuss the other two uses.

Οἰκονομία which means dispensation or administration, is used 9 times in Scripture to describe either a period in man's history or a stewardship¹³. Οἰκονόμος, which means steward, is used 10 times in Scripture for the one placed as the steward of a dispensation or administration¹⁴. These words come from a combination of two Greek words: house and law. By putting these two words together, we get a word that means a steward (the one who manages the house) or a stewardship (referring to the house that is managed by a steward).

The concept of a stewardship is not a foreign idea to Scripture. Throughout Scripture, there are many examples, in many different cultures that show how a household functioned under a stewardship. For each house there was a master, a steward, and those who were in the house, whether slaves or children. The master owned, and ultimately ruled over the house; however, often he appointed a steward who oversaw the daily tasks of the house; assigned work, dispensed supplies, and managed the affairs of the house. In Luke 12:42, 43 we have an example of what a steward does. *"Who is the faithful steward and wise whom the lord may set over his servants, to give portions of food in due season? Happy is this slave, which the lord, having come, will find doing thusly."*

The Septuagint used οἰκονόμοι fifteen times to translate the Hebrew word עֲלֵה־בַּיִת which has the same basic idea¹⁵. In Genesis 15:2 Abraham had a steward named Eliazer, who would have inherited Abraham's possessions if he remained childless. In Genesis, Joseph, the son of Israel (Jacob) whose brothers sold him as a slave, become the steward of the nation of Egypt. Before he became the steward of the nation of Egypt, he was placed over the house of the one who purchased him. As a steward, the entire household was put in his hands, in so much that the master did not even know what he

¹³ Luke 16:2 – 4; 1 Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10; 3:2, 9; Colossians 1:25; 1 Timothy 1:4

¹⁴ Luke 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8, 23; 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2; Galatians 4:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10

¹⁵ Although the Septuagint is a terrible translation of the Hebrew Language there are cases where we can refer to it to see how words were used by their translation. עֲלֵה־בַּיִת is often translated by οἰκονόμοι, which lends more support to the understanding of what one who is a steward does since עֲלֵה־בַּיִת is often used in the Old Testament for the steward of a house.

had, only the food that he ate¹⁶. When Joseph is placed over all of Egypt, he is given authority to rule the people and only Pharaoh himself was greater¹⁷. Even during Jesus' time upon the earth stewards were still in use. Jesus uses an example based upon an unjust steward in Luke 16:1-9. *"Now He was also saying to the disciples, there was a certain rich man who had a steward, and this steward was reported to him as squandering his possessions. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'"* This steward was responsible for developing and protecting the rich man's possessions. However, he was found to be wasting them and was therefore removed from his stewardship. Also in the New Testament, Romans 16:23 informs us of Erastus, the steward of a city. Erastus would be the man that managed the affairs of the City. From these sections of Scripture, we can determine that the normal use of the words for dispensation and steward refer to a household and the management of the house, which requires a master of the house, a steward, and individuals that are a part of the house; however, we still need Scriptural support to divide the Scriptures up by dispensations.

We know that you cannot just take any concept and apply it to Scripture and expect it to be true. Scripture is not designed to be taken allegorically; its design is to be taken literally, according to the normal use of language, which is why the New Testament was written in the common Greek language of that day. We can apply the concept of a dispensation to dividing Scripture only because God applies it. In Ephesians 1:9, 10, Paul is writing about the fact that God has made the mystery of His desirous will known to us. His will, the one according to His good pleasures and purpose, is that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He will gather all things together in Christ. Here God uses "dispensation" to describe a period of time in which He brings together all things in Christ. Ephesians 3:2 states that Paul was given the stewardship over the dispensation of grace. *"Since indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, the one given to me for you."* This dispensation is a period of time in man's history that was kept secret from the beginning of the ages, but was given to Paul to bring it to light, Ephesians 3:9. As the steward of the dispensation

¹⁶ Genesis 39:1-6

¹⁷ Genesis 41:40-45

of grace, God entrusted Paul with the mysteries that pertain to this dispensation, 1 Corinthians 4:1. A mystery is something that was kept hidden but has now been revealed, Colossians 1:26. The mystery of Israel's blindness¹⁸, the Christ¹⁹, the man of lawlessness²⁰, Christ in you²¹, the faith²², not all will see death²³, and godliness²⁴ were all entrusted to Paul and as the steward of this dispensation he passed those on to us, those of the household of grace. Scripture even states that Moses was over a household and draws a contrast between the house Moses was in and Christ's house²⁵. Hebrews 3:4-6 *"For every house is prepared by someone, but the one who prepared all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all his house as an attendant²⁶, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later. But Christ according as a Son over his house whose house we are if we hold fast the boldness and boast of hope firm until the end."*

Since God has divided sections of man's history into dispensations, we can legitimately take this same concept and apply it to the whole of scripture to determine accurately each time God divides mankind into different households. However, we do not want to divide Scripture excessively, that is, to make more dispensations than there really are in Scripture. We need to apply this concept correctly. In order to prevent going astray, we should set some guidelines according to the normal use the words οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία. Through the use of these words, we see that there must be a master of the household, a steward, and those within the house. The steward is a part of the house, but is put above those within the house to manage and care for the house. When it comes to Scripture, the master of the house is obviously God, so that part is covered. Therefore, each dispensation must have a steward and those who are in the household before it can qualify as a dispensation. Also as we look through Scripture we will see that the same steward is never placed over more than one house and the same rules are not applied to different houses. Therefore, we are not going to have a change in dispensation

¹⁸ Romans 11:25

¹⁹ Ephesians 3:4

²⁰ 2 Thessalonians 2:7

²¹ Colossians 1:27

²² 1 Timothy 3:9

²³ 1 Corinthians 15:51

²⁴ 1 Timothy 3:16

²⁵ Hebrews 3:6

²⁶ ἐράποντός, *an attendant, servant*

with the same steward, or a change in stewards within the same dispensation, or using the same rules for more than one dispensation. In order for someone to be considered as the steward of a dispensation they must have been given instruction by God on the standards that those in the household are to live, and is therefore are responsible for passing theses instruction on to all others in that household or specifically stated to be the steward of a dispensation in Scripture. With this in mind, let us look at Scripture as a whole.

When we go back to Genesis, it does not take long to run into God giving instruction to Adam on the standard by which he and all others at that time are to live by. He may eat of all of the fruit of the trees of the garden except for the tree in the midst of the garden; the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:16, 17 "and the LORD God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it dying you will die." Adam then passed this on to Eve. There is not a specific record of Adam passing it on, however, God gave the instructions to Adam before He formed the woman and when Satan tempts Eve, she gave a slightly different version. Not only are you not to eat of the tree, she states you are not to even touch the tree, which Adam no doubt added to God's instructions, Genesis 3:1-3. This is the first recorded dispensation of Scripture. God gave Adam instructions and he was expected to relay those instructions to everyone else. Now at this time, the only other human was Eve; however, this still meets the requirements for a dispensation. God is the master, Adam is the steward, and Eve is the subject of the house. Since God did not choose to state when each dispensation started and ended, in order to keep them straight in our minds we can name the dispensation. The easiest way to do this is to take the characteristics of the dispensation and use it for the name. In the case with Adam and Eve, at this time both are innocent, and untested. Therefore, if we call this dispensation the dispensation of innocence we have a title that immediately identifies with the household. The dispensation of innocence ended when Adam broke the law and God

administered punishment. This punishment was spiritual death, subjection to physical death, a curse upon the earth, and expulsion from the Garden of Eden²⁷.

Adam is no longer the steward and the household has been abolished. Mankind can no longer access the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, nor eat of the fruit of the other trees in the garden and is therefore not under that law anymore. Now that man knows good and evil, it is the responsibility of mankind to properly govern the manner of their lives according to their conscience. The conscience is the part of our mind that lines up our actions with what we know is good or evil and when our actions violate this knowledge, it causes us grief.

Although scriptures does not specifically state that the next dispensation is the dispensation of conscience, by looking at the characteristics of how men were to govern their lives we can understand that it was by the knowledge of what is good and evil; i.e. by their conscience. In the fourth chapter of Genesis, we are brought into the lives of Cain and Able, the sons of Adam during a time when both brought an offering before the Lord. Cain knew what was acceptable for an offering, but chose rather to offer the works of his own labor. Since it was not suitable, God did not look upon it and this caused Cain to become angry. God specifically told Cain what was expected of mankind at that time. If you do good you will be approved, but if you do evil than the sin nature lies at the door and Cain was to rule over the desires from his sin nature, and was to do that which is good²⁸. Cain was the one that was given these instructions by God and should have passed them on, but rather he chose to slay his brother as a sacrifice. Although Cain was punished for slaying Able²⁹, the dispensation does not end until every intent of the thoughts of mankind become evil continually all the day long³⁰. Man had failed again, and judgment was upon them³¹.

After the flood, God gives Noah instruction on the conduct that He would require of men. In this new administration, man is now liable with his own life if he murders

²⁷ Genesis 3:14-24

²⁸ Genesis 4:7

²⁹ 1 John 3:12 – the Greek word translated slaughter is a word that is used for how a sacrificed an animal is slain

³⁰ Genesis 6:5

³¹ Genesis 7 – the Noahic flood

another man. In addition, the dietary requirements of men are changed, allowing eating animal flesh, and men were to spread out and fill the earth³². Under the dispensation of conscience when Cain slew Able, God marked him so that no one else would kill him and God sent Cain away to be a vagabond. Under this new dispensation, Noah is instructed that if a man takes the life of another, his life is to be taken by man, Genesis 9:6. The failure of this dispensation was in two fold. Men that murdered where not put to death and the people did not scatter to fill the earth, rather they disobeyed God and chose to stay together, Genesis 10: 9³³ and 11:1-4. As a result of the failure, God brought a division of languages, that still remains to this day, therefore, forcing men to scatter across the earth³⁴.

The next dispensation, which would be the fourth one, is one that can be characterized as a dispensation of promise because God takes one man out of all of mankind and makes three covenants with him based upon promises. Abraham, who was known as Abram before God changes his name³⁵, was given the promise of land for him and his decedents. It starts with a promise to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3, in which God promised to make him a might nation, to bless those who bless him, to curse those who curse him, and by him all the families of the earth will be blessed.

The first covenant that God made with Abraham is in Genesis 15:18-21. This covenant was for a specific section of land that God would give Abraham and his decedents. God gave the second covenant to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-8 where, at first glance it seems as though God is expanding on the first covenant; however, the second covenant involves a greater portion of land than the first, and that Abraham would be the father of many nations³⁶.

As the steward of the dispensation of promise, Abraham is directly instructed by God that he and his seed are to guard His covenant, Genesis 17:9 and that the third

³² Genesis 9:1-7

³³ Nimrod was a hunter of mighty ones – He used violence to faint power. In verse 10 Nimrod's kingdom began.

³⁴ Genesis 11:5-9

³⁵ Genesis 17:5

³⁶ Once a covenant is made, it cannot be added to or disannulled. Therefore, this covenant could not add to the first covenant, Galatians 3:15

covenant is to stand as a sign of the second covenant, Genesis 17:11. The third covenant was circumcision³⁷.

(There is a fourth covenant in Genesis 22:17 given to Abraham; however, this covenant was not for his seeds as in plural, but for one seed. This one seed, who would be many, would possess the gates of his enemies and all the nations on the earth would be blessed in him. In Galatians 3:16 Paul states that this seed is Christ. Therefore, this covenant does not apply to the dispensation of promise. Rather this is a promise that the Messiah or as we now know, God the Son will be incarnated through the seed of Abraham.)

When God first gave Abraham a covenant, He also foretold what would happen to the nation of Israel. God spoke of a time that the whole nation would serve another nation for four hundred years, then God would take them out of that land and bring them into the land promised to Abraham in the first covenant³⁸. The failure of the dispensation of promise came after the nation of Israel was miraculously brought out from under slavery by the hand of God to stand before God at Mount Sinai. There, through Moses, God reiterated the standard by which the nation of Israel was to live. They were to guard the covenant of land that was promised to their father, Abraham. However, rather than accepting this standard, the nation chose to show God how righteous they could be and they said, "you keep on telling us what to do and we will do it", Exodus 19:8³⁹. They rejected promise and requested law. Therefore, that is exactly what they received.

With Moses as the steward⁴⁰, God gave the Law and changed the dispensation from promise to law⁴¹. Although the people who are in the house did not change, the steward and the rules of the household did change. The Majority of the Old Testament and the beginning of the Gospels in the New Testament deal with the Dispensation of

³⁷ Genesis 17:11-14

³⁸ Genesis 15:13-16

³⁹ The action in the verb do is incomplete. They will keep on doing whatever the Lord says. You can also see in the context and by the response from God that the people rejected promise. In verse nine God makes an offer to them to be a nation of priest, in verse 12 the people, who would have been priests, were not allowed to touch the mountain, they could not communicate with God as a priest.

⁴⁰ Hebrews 3:2

⁴¹ Romans 3:19, 20

Law⁴². During the Dispensation of Law, Israel was required to live by the Mosaic Law and represented all mankind. Although God was not directly dealing with the Gentiles, a Gentile could become a proselyte of Judaism and have access to God in a limited way. The ultimate failure of the dispensation of law was Israel's rejection of the Messiah that God promised to provide through the seed of David.

The resurrection of Christ out from among dead men and the subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit by God the Father to all those who put their faith in Christ's dead for their sins, and resurrection from the dead, ushered in a new dispensation⁴³. Those who are in this household are not under the Mosaic Law, or any other law for that matter⁴⁴. In this dispensation, all those in the household are to live by faith⁴⁵. Unlike the last two dispensations, access into this house is granted to both Jew and Gentile equally⁴⁶.

The last dispensation mentioned in Scriptures is found in Ephesians 1:10, the dispensation of the fullness of times. During this dispensation, Christ is reigning over the earth from the New Jerusalem⁴⁷, the church saints are reigning with Him⁴⁸, Israel possess the land of the first covenant, Satan has been bound⁴⁹, the world system has been destroyed⁵⁰, and the sin nature is subdued by God's law being written in the hearts of the people⁵¹. Jesus himself gave the rules for this dispensation in Matthew chapters five through seven. The standard by which mankind is to live is very strict compared to other dispensation; however, with Satan bound, the sin nature subdued, and the world system destroyed, men will not have the distractions of past dispensations.

When dividing Scripture, we do not want to overdo it. We do not want to make divisions where there are no divisions. Through the study of οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία, we can see that God makes specific distinctions between households or dispensation.

⁴² Up until John 13 the gospels main speak of a time when man was still under law.

⁴³ Acts 2:1-4; John 20; Luke 24; Matthew 28; Mark 16

⁴⁴ Galatians 5:18; Romans 6:15

⁴⁵ Romans 1:17; Galatians 2:20; 3:11

⁴⁶ Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11; Romans 1:16

⁴⁷ Revelation 3:12; 21:2

⁴⁸ Revelation 3:21; 4:4; 11:16; 2 Timothy 2:12

⁴⁹ Revelation 20:2

⁵⁰ Psalm 2:8

⁵¹ Jeremiah 31:31-34

Although in the earlier dispensations, God does not specifically state what dispensations they are, we have an ample amount of information on the dispensations of Law, Grace, and the fullness of times to know that these are the later three dispensations. There are no other dispensations given in Scripture between the dispensation of Law and Grace or between the dispensation of Grace and the fullness of times.

Excessively dividing Scripture produces a theology that goes against what God is revealing in Scripture. Rather than taking and properly applying all of God's revelation for the grace believer, parts are left out. Some of these parts are very critical to our understanding of God's opinion of us and therefore how we govern our lives before Him. Those who tend to make unwarranted divisions with the Scriptures are often referred to as hyper-dispensationalists. Often times they want to make a division in the dispensation of grace from what they call the Jewish-church and the Gentile-church. However, God does not use οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία in describing any division of time within the dispensation of grace. Not to mention there are many other Scriptures which speak against two churches, such as Galatians 3:28 where Scripture states that in Christ there is no difference between Jew and Gentile⁵². We need to be cautious that as we divide Scripture we do not violate Scripture. A division in Scripture is not going to cause disagreement within the Word of God, rather, it should bring clarity.

The lack of division in Scripture also leads to problems. When we do not apply the proper divisions to Scripture, we begin to mix up the rules of the households and ultimately cause confusion and dissension. Two of the more dominant theologies that do this are covenant and reformed theology. I took a quote from a website that I thought did a rather good job of summing up covenant theology. *"Covenant theology is based on the theory that God has only one covenant with men (the covenant of grace) and only one people, represented by the Old and New Testament saints—one people, one church and one plan for all. These beliefs require the adherents of covenant theology to interpret prophecy in a nonliteral way. "...Those who hold to covenant theology believe that there is, and has always been, only one people of God. They believe that Israel was the Church in the Old Testament, and the Church is Israel in the New*

⁵² Colossians 3:11; Ephesians 2:11-19 states that the wall separating the Jew and Gentile has been removed and both are now equally a part of the household of God.

Testament. The promises of land, many descendants, and blessing to Israel in the Old Testament have been “spiritualized” and applied to the Church in the New Testament because of Israel’s unbelief and rejection of their Messiah. Those who hold to covenant theology also do not interpret prophecy in a normal sense. As an example, in Revelation 20, the thousand-year reign of Christ is spoken of. Covenant theology would say that the number 1,000 is symbolic and really does not mean a literal 1,000 years. They would say that we are in the millennium right now, that the reign of Christ with His saints is going on in heaven right now, and that the 1,000-year period is symbolic, beginning with the first coming of Christ and ending when He returns.⁵³

Covenant theology ignores the divisions in Scripture that God Himself makes. Therefore, in order to prevent conflicts it requires that the Scriptures are taken allegorically, which ultimately leads to perverting the meaning of the Scriptures. Since Covenant theology does not make any distinctions between dispensations, often time law is mixed with grace and promise as the means by which a Christian is to live, even though Scripture specifically states that the Christians are not under any quality of law⁵⁴. Reformed theology tends to do the same things as covenant theology when it comes to dividing scripture and is often called covenant theology. However, reformed theology is much harder to define because it does not hold to a specific belief other than the denial of dispensations⁵⁵.

There is more information given in Scripture on the later dispensations than the earlier ones. From the dispensation of law until the dispensation of the fullness of times, we have a good amount of information about the standards God set in these dispensations, including the history and future of mankind through these

⁵³ <http://www.gotquestions.org/covenant-theology.html>

⁵⁴ Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:18

⁵⁵ Although reformed theology claims to believe in the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God and salvation by grace there is a lot of division within its ranks, especially when it comes to how a person is saved and the Christian life. From reformed theology we get a lot of false gospels, such as make Jesus the Lord of your life, repent of your-self ruled life, accept Jesus into your heart, and so on; rather than going by Scripture which states in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 that to be saved you must believe that Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the scriptures. These division are why it is difficult to accurately define reformed theology as whole.

dispensation⁵⁶. Because we have so much information on these three dispensations, it is important that we properly divide Scripture so that we only apply what is written to those in the dispensation of Grace to how we live out our Christen life. Although there is some order to Scripture, the majority of the books we have in our Bible are not in chronological order. In addition, many of the books cover more than one dispensation. Therefore, it is important to look at the context in which all passages of Scripture are written and by that context determine which dispensation is being addressed. When dividing Scripture, we cannot just make a blanket statement that certain books only apply to one dispensation or another, context within each book has to be considered. However, that does not mean we cannot make distinctions. We do know there is a definite distinction between the Old and New Testament. Christians are under the New Covenant, which is a covenant that is built upon a better covenant and better promises⁵⁷. However, don't make the mistake of drawing a line between the Old and New Testament when it comes to what the Church is to follow by the way the Old and New Testament are divided in our Bibles. The division that our Bible has between the Old and New Testament is not accurate, so cutting the line there and saying that all Scripture after that point is for Christians would require that we disregard the context of the passages following the division. However, we can say with good accuracy that all of the Old Testament, which encompasses most of the Gospel accounts, is not for application in the Christian's life because we know that the dispensation of grace, which we are under, relates to the New Covenant; rather the Old Testament is for our admonitions⁵⁸. Therefore, we must always take Scripture in Context and determine who God is having the author write too.

Take for instance, events that took place during the life of Jesus in the Gospels. The Mosaic Law is still in effect and God still expects the Jews to keep it throughout the majority of the Gospel accounts. It is not until John chapter thirteen that Jesus begins to reveal the new relationship that is coming between God and man. A new relationship

⁵⁶ Although the dispensation of the fullness of time has not happened yet, Scripture gives us the standards and many of the events that will happen during this time. Such as Egypt being in a drought for 100 years; the New Jerusalem will be above the earth and provide light; all nations will be subject to Israel; the standards by which the people on earth are to live; and how life will be to a certain degree.

⁵⁷ Hebrews 8:6

⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:11

that is made possible through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This relationship was coming because those of the dispensation of law not only rejected God's law, but also were about to put the promised Messiah to death. Therefore, when reading through the Gospels it is important to take the context into consideration. Such as Matthew chapters 5 through 7, which cannot be applied to the Christian life because the context does not allow it. Jesus is speaking to the Jews about the rules of the Kingdom that He is offering, the one that God had promised. These Jews have no concept of nor has Jesus revealed at this time the fact of his death, burial, and resurrection.

Rightly dividing the Word of God requires that we follow God in His division of Scripture, always consider the context, and do not apply something to our lives as Christians that is for another dispensation.

An Overseer's Position is Similar to Steward

Within the requirements for an Elder (Pastor)⁵⁹ that Paul is giving to Titus in Titus 1:7, he states that a Bishop is like a steward. Paul uses ὡς to express this likeness. A Bishop (Pastor) is not the steward, but rather their position is likened to that of a steward. A Bishop is to provide food for the flock, care for and provide what they need to grow spiritually⁶⁰. However, a Bishop's similarity to a steward is not in the realm of ruling over the church. In 1 Peter 5:3, Peter instructs that elders that they are not to use their position to lord over the church. κατακυριεύω means to hold in subjection, or exercise lordship over. The same word is used in the description of how the gentile leaders act when they hold a position of authority⁶¹. An elder (Pastor) does not have this kind of authority over the church. Rather he is likened to a steward because he provides what the flock needs in a spiritual sense.

The Spiritual gift of Pastor even teacher was given to the Church for edification the body as the members grow in their faith to bring unity and a full experiential knowledge of the Son of God, and for the members of the Church to live up to God's opinion of them, no longer being tossed around by every wind doctrine⁶².

⁵⁹ Titus 1:4, 5 Titus is to appointed elders in each city. The overseer (Bishop) in 1:7 is used synonymously with elder.

⁶⁰ 1 Peter 5:2 feed the flock

⁶¹ Mark 10:42 the ones recognized as ruler lord their position over the gentile.

⁶² Ephesians 4:11-16

Being good stewards of our Spiritual gifts

Each one of us, when we are placed into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, are given a spiritual gift⁶³. As part of the Body of Christ, we are to use our gift for the edification of the saints⁶⁴. In 1 Peter 4:10, we are instructed to use our gifts to serve others within the body of Christ as stewards. Just as Peter likened an elder to a steward, here he compares you to a steward in the realm of your Spiritual gift. You should be dispensing your Spiritual gift, or using your Spiritual gift, to the other saints to supplying what they need for their edification.

An Elder is like a steward in the realm of providing Spiritual food for the flock. However, since we all are part of one Body, and the Body has many parts, all of the other saints also have a part in providing for the Body⁶⁵. The active Spiritual gifts today are: Evangelist⁶⁶; Pastor even teacher⁶⁷; serving⁶⁸; helps⁶⁹; teacher⁷⁰; exhorter⁷¹; giving⁷²; faith⁷³; administration⁷⁴; organization⁷⁵; mercy⁷⁶. Each one of us who are in the Body of Christ has been given one of these Spiritual gifts and we are to use that gift similar to how a steward would be provided for the needs of the household, dispensing it accordingly to fulfill the needs of the saints.

There are Spiritual gifts that were given to the Church in its infancy so that the Saints were able to receive instructions from God on how to live properly in the dispensation of grace before the completion of the revelation that God was presenting through the Apostles at that time. These gifts are: Apostle⁷⁷; prophet⁷⁸; the word of

⁶³ 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Peter 4:10 each one receives a gift

⁶⁴ Ephesians 4:12;

⁶⁵ Ephesians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

⁶⁶ Ephesians 4:11

⁶⁷ Ephesians 4:11

⁶⁸ Romans 12:7 although *διακονία* is used, it is not used as the position of a deacon; rather as a gift to serve others within the body. This is one that helps or serves the church by laying hold of any menial task in the church, and providing assistance to the saints in need.

⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:28

⁷⁰ Romans 12:7 Different from a pastor

⁷¹ Romans 12:8

⁷² Romans 12:8

⁷³ 1 Corinthians 12:9

⁷⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:28 *κυβέρνησις* a governing, government

⁷⁵ Romans 12:8 *προΐστημι* to be over, to superintend, preside over

⁷⁶ Romans 12:8

⁷⁷ Ephesians 4:12

⁷⁸ Ephesians 4:12

wisdom⁷⁹; the word of experiential knowledge⁸⁰; gift of healings⁸¹; working of miracles⁸²; discerning of spirits⁸³; speaking in another language⁸⁴; interpretation of languages⁸⁵. These gifts are no longer in use because we now have the full revelation (the Bible in its entirety.)⁸⁶. God is not giving any new revelation. Therefore, all the gifts that relate to and provide proof of revelation are no longer required.

The active gifts are all gifts that have to do with edifying the Church and allowing it to function in a proper manner. Each gift is of great importance to the Body, no one gift is greater than any other gift. As a part of the Body of Christ you need to be dispensing your gift to the saints, regardless of what it is, or whether others see you using it, for just as preaching and teaching are vital for the health of the Body, so is administration, organization, teaching, faith, helps, ministries, mercy, giving, and exhortation.

Through the use of οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία, God reveals in Scripture that there are different dispensations. Each of these dispensations has different standards, which are dispensed by a steward appointed by God. Therefore, we can define a dispensation as a period of time in which God administers standards through a steward by which those who are in the household ought to live. By taking God at His Word and dividing Scripture properly, we begin to understand what God is doing and what He expects of us. It also becomes clear that not every part of Scripture is for our practice. Since we are in the dispensation of Grace, it is important that we understand how God expects us to conduct our lives. We are not under law, so what is the standard then? We determine this by rightly dividing the Word of God and applying to our lives only the sections that address the saints of the dispensation of Grace. Although we do not apply the standards of other dispensations to how we live, that does not mean they are of no value to us. We

⁷⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:8 wisdom is using knowledge correctly

⁸⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:8 this is a knowledge that related to how the church was to function – and experiential knowledge.

⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 12:9

⁸² 1 Corinthians 12:10

⁸³ 1 Corinthians 12:10

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:10 – this is a language that is known and goes to the point of being accurate even to the dialect, Acts 2:7-11. And was used to proclaim the wonderful works of God.

⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:10 the ability to understand what another person/ who is using their spiritual gift of speaking in another language, is saying when it is not your language.

⁸⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:7-10 the thing in part is revelation. Once the revelation has been completely given, the gifts that are used to bring and validate the Word of God are no longer necessary.

can learn through the failures of other dispensations what not to do⁸⁷. Adam failed because he knowingly broke the law of God⁸⁸. The results of his disobedience affected the entire human race⁸⁹. Our conscience cannot be trusted because during the time when mankind was to govern themselves by their conscience to do what is good, they failed and their thoughts became completely corrupted⁹⁰. Before trusting our conscience, we should make sure it lines up with what God says. During the dispensation of government, the refusal of man to govern himself resulted in the complete rejection of God, to the point that men changed the image of the incorruptible God to that of corruptible man, beasts, and insects⁹¹. In the dispensation of promise all the Jews had to do was to take God at His Word; however, they chose to show God through their action how righteous they could be before Him⁹². The dispensation of Law shows us that by our actions alone we cannot please God⁹³. Ephesians 3:2 states that God gave Paul the dispensation of grace. This is the dispensation that we are in now. We are to live by faith, taking God at His word, not by any law⁹⁴. Will we fail? Will we not learn from the past? Since God has given us information on the next dispensation, we can also learn from it. During the dispensation of the fullness of times, men who live upon the earth will enjoy a perfect environment. Satan will be bound, the world system will be destroyed, the law of God is written upon their hearts, and Christ will reign over the earth in the New Jerusalem. However, even in such perfect conditions, mankind ultimately rejects God.

Thus we have considered the usage of οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία and we can see that they play a significant role in our understanding of Scripture. God divides mankind's history into household. Therefore, we should have the same approach to Scripture and only apply the sections of God's Word to our lives that are addressed to those who are in our dispensation. Besides understanding that we should divide Scripture, the study of οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία also teach us that in a similar manner as

⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:11

⁸⁸ 2 Timothy 2:14 Adam was not deceived by Satan

⁸⁹ Romans 5:12-21

⁹⁰ Genesis 6:5

⁹¹ Romans 1:19-32

⁹² Exodus 19:8

⁹³ Romans 3:20

⁹⁴ Romans 1:17

a steward we should use our Spiritual gift for the edification of other saints. God has put us in the Body of Christ and has supplied for us what we need to function as a member of Christ's Body. Just as a Pastor is similar to a steward in giving the saints what they need from God's Word to grow spiritual, so we should use our gift so that others may grow.