

THE MYSTERY HID FROM THE AGES.
(Col: 1v26.)

Dispensations.

This is by no means a 'new' truth. However, when I first came across it some fifty-five years ago, the teaching of the assembly that I was in at that time was that it was 'error'. As a 'new boy', I assumed that they knew better than I did and I put the subject to one side. However, over the years of study in the Word, I have come to see that splits in denominations are formed because of differences of opinion about the meaning of God's Word. I also found that these 'splits' were often over some small detail in that Word. What did become obvious was that the general definition of a 'dispensation' was that it was 'a period of time' into which the ages were divided, such as the Law and Grace ones. Very little more was said about the subject. However it became clear that that was not the prime meaning of the word. If, for example, you go to a doctor and he/she prescribes a particular medicine, you then go to the pharmacy from which the medicine is **dispensed**. You don't go home with a bag, or bottle, of 'time'. What is dispensed is the prescribed medicine. Time only enters into the equation because it takes time to put together, and then hand over, the prescription. The Doctor, the Dispenser and what is dispensed are the three main objects in the matter; the time, though in certain circumstances it can play a vital part, is not really relevant at all. (Having said that, I realise that God's timings are precise.) Carrying this over into Christianity, we could liken the Doctor to God, Who has diagnosed our problem and has referred us to the various dispensers who, in turn, hand out the necessary remedy for our ailment. Suppose that there were three different patients, each with a different problem, resulting in three different prescriptions. If you happened to be one of those three patients, you would need to be sure that you got the correct treatment that had been prescribed for you. If one of the three people refused to take their medicine, it wouldn't be wise for you to take it instead of yours. Understand that I am not referring to your basic salvation here, for the need to be 'born from above' is common to all. It is one of God's 'musts' as you will see from Jn: 3. Once you have fulfilled that condition, i.e. 'you **must** be born from above', you will then need to be trained by the Holy Spirit, and that is where what I am talking about comes in. Having said that, it has to be admitted that there is far more to the subject and I'd like to bring some of it to your attention now.

The Greek word for 'dispensation' is OIKONOMIA and it is only used seven times in the New Testament. On four of those occasions it is translated as 'dispensation' and the other three times as 'stewardship'. Two English words for the same Greek one! Strong defines the word as 'administration (of a household or estate.)' This is seen more clearly when we follow it back to its root word: in this case we find that oikonomia comes from the word 'oikonomos', which in turn is defined as: 'a house distributor (i.e. manager), or overseer, i.e. an employee in that capacity; by extension, a fiscal agent (treasurer); fig: a preacher (of the Gospel)'. It is translated in the A.V as: chamberlain, governor, steward. However, in turn, the root of this second word, i.e. 'oikonomos' is the Greek word 'oikos'. This, in turn, is defined as 'a dwelling', and is translated in the A.V as: home, house(hold), temple. Our word, oikonomia, is clearly referring to the **running of** a house or estate. Not all houses

are run in the same way and scripture would bear this fact out. If, for example, the Church were subject to the 'dispensation' of the Law, things would have to be very different from what they are now.

When we look at the seven – (*Wigram says there are eight*) - times the word is used in scripture, (namely Lk16v2, 3 & 4, where it is translated as 'stewardship', 1 Cor9v17, where it is 'dispensation', as it is also in Eph 1v10, 3v2 & Col 1v25,) and at the same time we take into account their context, we are left in no doubt that a dispensation speaks of the way in which God's household is to be, or is being, managed.

For those who understand and believe the 'law of the first mention' it is worth noting that all three, i.e. the first, second and third mentions of our word occur in Lk 16v2-4, whilst the second, third and fourth mentions of its root, oikonomos, are also there, the latter being translated as 'steward'. Its own first mention being where the Lord speaks of the faithful one – see Lk 12v42 etc: - who was watching over His house whilst He was away and stating that this would be the one who would be put over His goods when He returned, implying that this is a testing time now. From these first mentions of the two words, we see that the one we are looking at, i.e. oikonomia, refers to the way that the household is run, whilst its root, oikonomos, refers to the office of the one employed to run the house.

It is interesting to pronounce the word 'oikonomia' slowly, for if you do, you can hear our word 'economy' coming through.

If we now take into account that we are God's house, – see 1 Cor: 3v16-7, 1 Cor: 6v19, 2 Cor: 6v16 and Eph: 2v21 - it becomes important to find out how many economies God has, and if there happens to be more than one of them, to be sure about which one of them would apply to us.

We are God's building, His Temple, His house. When you first enter someone's home, you invariably get an impression about them. When we enter God's house we should expect to be impressed. At the end of 1 Cor: chaps: 12 through 14, where the Holy Spirit teaches that there should be no confusion in His house, the final comment, i.e. v40 says, 'Let all things be done decently and in order.' In returning to our thought about going to the Doctor and likening it to God dealing with the problem of mankind's sin and the consequent scatterings that occurred because of it, we are able to grasp that each 'dispensation' is dealing with the after-effects of the awful sin problem. God is restoring His children to Himself, each 'house' having its own 'prescription'. We are being trained in the Christ-life and when the training has run its full course, we shall indeed be 'like Him'. One of the things common to each 'dispensation' is ORDER. Looking around at the chaos that sin produced we need to grasp the importance of that 40th: verse above and to be sure that all we are within the church, and outside of it, comes within those bounds of 'decently and in order.'

1st: Session – 25/11/09.

To be continued.