***How Then Should I Live? No. 2  
  
Colossians 1:24-29  
  
COL-197***

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Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is alive and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far the division of the soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

1 Peter 2:1-3: "Therefore, putting aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisy, and envy, and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

2 Peter 3:18: "Grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity."

This morning, we continue in our study of Colossians 1:25-29. The subject is "The Mystery of the Church," segment number 12.

In eternity past, the members of the Godhead (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) held a council in which they ordained what we refer to theologically as the divine decree, or the decrees of God. God is sovereign. He is in charge. He is the King. And there is no chance in the universe. Nothing happens by accident. It is all the ordained decrees of God that have determined where history is going to move, and all that is going to happen. This included the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross, as is pointed out in Acts 2:23, where Peter says, "This man (referring to Jesus Christ) delivered up by the predetermined plan." And there's a decree of God. The council of the Godhead determined that this was the plan. And foreknowledge of God, and because God had decreed a plan, then God knew what was going to happen. God doesn't learn things by looking down the corridor of time, and seeing what people are going to do on their own. They don't do things on their own. "Foreknowledge" means that God has decreed. So, God knows ahead of time. You nailed Jesus Christ to a cross, by the hands of Godless men, and put in Him to death. This was part of the divine decree – the way that God was going to resolve the moral guilt of mankind, through the sacrifice of Christ, the innocent Lamb of God.

So, the divine decree has decided all that would take place in creation, which God was then to speak into existence. And the divine decree never has to be revised, and it will never be revoked. A perfect God has come up with a perfect plan. The divine decree includes the preordained progression of human history on earth. The divine decree ordained that world history was to progress from Eden to the end of time in a series of epochs of time, or dispensations. These have been revealed in the Bible. How do we know about the doctrine of the dispensations? Like any other doctrine, – because it's in the Bible. This is not something which is being imposed upon Scripture.

These dispensations (periods – epochs of time) have distinctive ways of life within each one of them in how man relates to God, including a special age, never revealed before by God until New Testament times. And that is the dispensation of the church. That is the magnificent age, where God operates primarily on the basis of His grace, with all that that means to us.

In our study of Colossians 1:25, the apostle Paul refers to this particular epoch in human history, when he says, "Of this church, I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed upon me." This word "stewardship" is also translated, as it is in the King James Bible, by the word "dispensation." And I'll tell you in a moment why that is.

So, Paul says "stewardship," speaking about an epoch of time in which God deals with mankind on a very particular basis, and on very clear operational principles and protocols: how you do things; how you proceed; how the system works; and, what the plan is. The Godhead determined, in the divine decree, to create a time of magnificent access by saved people to the grace and power of God – an access that brought them into great intimacy with God. But this is not true of most Christians. They do not live in great intimacy with God. They do not have the sense that they are walking into great intimacy with God. They do not have the awareness that they may turn to Him, and find guidance – very distinct; very clear; and, very determined, and that they may find help in time of need. They do not understand what it is to be grace-oriented. As a matter of fact, it is not unusual for Christians to think that grace means license; that grace means that there are no rules; that grace means that they don't have to do anything; and that grace means that they don't have to be told what to do.

In times past, we have had people who have been in our educational system like Sunday school, where we have laid out a policy form, and we have said, "If you wish to be a teacher, we want you to be a teacher of this class. Here are the policies under which you will teach. And you must read these, and understand them, and sign this statement such that, to the best of your ability, you will follow them. These are things like: you will prepare your lesson; you will show up to teach your class; you will be there on time; you will treat the Word of God with respect; you will not teach what is false (what is your opinion; and, write down the line. You'll keep in touch with your students, and so on, in order to make that effective. Believe it or not, some people say, "Hey, I'm under grace. I don't have to sign that." And they walked out. The said, "I'm not going to teach that class. I'm not going to sign a statement. I'm free."

Yeah, to this very day, some of them are free. They never taught again. When they sign up for Judgment Seat of Christ, oh, the tears are going to well up, as God says, "Do you remember that time back there when you wouldn't say, "Yes, I will subscribe to these quality standards, so that your organization could have some control of what they're doing with your children? That was a very bad mistake. That's what you lost. It could have been yours."

So, the dispensations of God and the age of grace – this special, never-revealed-before era (until the New Testament times) is the best of all times to be born. But if you don't understand how to live under grace; if you don't understand the protocols; and, if you don't understand how important it is for you understand that don't have any options but to live by those protocols, it's going to be disaster for you out there at the Judgment Seat of Christ. You can kid yourself all you want, but that's the way it's going to be. And for anybody who doesn't understand the principles of the doctrine of dispensations, they have no hope. Their lives are going to be botched up and wasted, almost without exception.

So, the Godhead decreed that this would be a time of being able to walk with great intimacy with God, because God's grace makes it possible. God's grace said, "I'm going to make it possible for you to be saved. Come into the family." And you believed. God's grace said, Now, I'm going to make you a magnificent man or woman, with great freedoms to obey the rules; to be true to Me; and, to live with integrity by My moral standards. I am going to do it for you, unless you butt Me out. I'll keep you from being a cheat. I'll keep you from being a liar. I'll keep you from being a deceiver. I'll keep you from being greedy. I'll keep you from all the things that do not reflect the person of Christ. I'll do that for you unless you push Me out, and keep the Spirit of God from being able to function in your life because of unconfessed sin.

So, it's a way of life in which the individual believer has unbelievable capacities through Bible doctrine for possessing the mind of God and the mentality of his soul, and the power of the Spirit of God functioning in his life.

**Emotions**

The reason the average Christian does not have this is because he's not taught doctrine. The pulpit doesn't do its job. When the pulpit doesn't do its job, people don't have doctrine, and they want to have something in the way of intimacy with God, there's only one place to go. Emotions. So, you have the emotional domination of the soul, which is the kiss of death in the Christian life. And yet, in Christendom, this is the norm. The emotions dominate the soul – not the objective standard of doctrine. The subjectivism of the emotions dominate, and it's expressed everywhere. We get up and sing a song, and we do it just like they do in Las Vegas. We have a line, and we repeat it, and repeat it, and repeat it, until we're all hypnotized. There's a word we love to sin: "Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah." We just love to repeat "hallelujah." So, there's a word that occurs once in the New Testament, but it occurs 50 times in the average song that people like to sing today, because the Charismatics are pretty well corrupted. They don't sing the great, magnificent hymns such as we sang by Martin Luther this morning, with doctrinal content, and significant melodic lines.

If you go to emotions, the devil has you in his grip. And if you think he doesn't, go ahead and keep telling yourself. But I love the Judgment Seat of Christ. It's going to be serious for all of us, but boy, all questions and all differences will then be debated.

I've been amazed how mad it makes people when you say, "We're going to find out there who is right and who is wrong on some particular issue that we're debating." They just get enraged, because do you know what? Suddenly, they realize that: "I can't just emote about this, and play Mr. Charismatic Guy, and blow this off. There's a power higher than myself, and I'm going to face it. And it makes me doggone mad because I can't blow off this Christian, who has the audacity to think that God's going to remember, and He is going to make the judgments that need to be made. But that's the other side of the age of grace. In the age of the church, there are magnificent assets, but also potential for great self-destruction and losses.

It's like somebody who is poor. How much trouble can you get into when you don't have a lot of money to spend? I mean, if you're poor, you have to be really gifted to get in trouble – something like Bob Short, or something. You can't do much when you don't have a lot of money. But if you have a lot of money, think of what you can do. At the same time, what magnificent good you could do, to have access to great funds – the magnificent things that you could do in the age of grace, because God will never be indebted. He will pile it right back on you now, or He'll bring it into eternity for you. That's a win-win situation. It never happened with the Jews. It never happen in any other dispensation.

**The World, the Sin Nature, and the Devil**

So, when we had the magnificence of grace, that's the time that people really botch up. They simply cannot learn how to first become something spiritually in Christ, before they start making decisions about their lives. And we will look back on all those decisions, and say, "How in the world could I have been so stupid to do that?" It's because you are not oriented to the grace of God. And that life was not free to function in you. It is a way of life in which the world system (the sin nature and the devil) can be resisted and defeated by the Christian. Those are the three sources that will bring you down to defeat. It will be when you become part of the world system, instead of a stranger and a pilgrim in it. It will be the sin nature that gets out of control, and can run your life, as it will under emotional domination of the soul. Or, it will be the devil himself. Those are the three places where you're going to get socked with evil.

**The World**

For most of us (Christians who know something), it's the world that's the biggest problem. The world system; its ways; its institutions; and, what it's doing – that's what we're up to our elbows in. And we think that God has called us to do it there; to change it; and, to make it better. It is a way of life – this age of the church – a special relationship to God the Son, and to God the Holy Spirit for the individual Christians. And it is for this age only. These are things that were never true of a human being and His relationship to God in any other age, and will never be true after us. We've gone over many of those relationships in the past.

It is a time of great personal freedom. It is a time of direct access to God. You are your own priest. It is a time of ability to live a holy life, in separation from evil. It is a time to be able to walk with God, and not lie to yourself about how you are; what you are; and, where things are going. It is a time of divine service as a royal ambassador from the court of heaven, proclaiming the Word of God – in the world, but we are not part of the world.

Christians have all these magnificent assets at their disposal. We are therefore to appear to people, and we are to act as is compatible with the protocols (the course, and the principles of etiquette) and the procedure established by God the Father for the royal family of God – the church. Ours is a holy life, separated from the world system, reflecting in ourselves the glory of Jesus Christ, and devotion to the mission for which our spiritual gifts qualify us to be people of honor; a people of integrity; and, above all, to be people of love who reflect the love of God in our lives, and in how we deal with people, and the tenderness of genuine compassion.

The dispensation of the church is, of course, in stark contrast to the previous dispensation of the Law. In Romans 7:12, the apostle Paul said, "So then the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and righteous, and good." There was nothing wrong with the Old Testament Law. There was nothing wrong with those 813 rules. They were holy. They were righteous. They reflected the character of God. And in heaven's name, if a person could live by them, you would have been a magnificent human being that God could prosper in a tremendous way.

However, notice Romans 8:3-4: "For what the Law could not do, despite that it was holy and righteous and good, weak as it was through the flesh (the sin nature) God did; sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh." Because of the sin nature, man could not obey those laws that reflected the character and the righteous standard of God. What is the righteous standard? Absolute righteousness. There is no way that they could obey. So, Christ came, and said, "I did it for you. I'm attributing this to your credit – just on your account that you have kept every rule of God perfectly. Now there is nothing hindering Me from blessing you except you standing in the way.

Verse 4: "In order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh (to the sin nature), but according to the Spirit. Suddenly, being able to live by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Who never indwelt any other saints in the Old Testament (in the previous dispensation), but for us, He is there always, that we, in stark contrast to the age of the Law, can live lives that God bless. The marvelous details about the dispensation of the church were primarily revealed to the apostle Paul, and he recorded them in the New Testament epistles.

When we say "a dispensation, that's the word: "lifestyle" – it's how you live. It's a protocol set up – what the rules are, and the guidelines. Any attempt to incorporate the lifestyle of the dispensation of Law with the dispensation of the church is a disaster, and it is condemned by God.

Paul revealed a dynamic spiritual power system which God the Father has provided for His Son Jesus to live by in His humanity. That is how He lived on this earth, not by the power of His deity. He lived by His humanity, the same way you have to live. And Christ said, "If you are filled with the knowledge of doctrine, and if you possess a storage of Bible doctrine in your human spirit, and you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you will be victorious in everything you do spiritually. You'll do right. Jesus field-tested the system, and it was magnificent. You retained His sinlessness. God the Father, through the apostle Paul, has revealed this dynamic power system provided by God for the saints of this church dispensation only, so that we can live victoriously in Satan's world. We are not dogs and pigs who cannot help ourselves. We are that when we choose to be.

**Lot**

Please remember, that anytime you are not Christlike, you're not just a nice, stupid, running-around puppy. You are a dog or a pig. It's the worst thing. There's no place to go. Most Christians today, unfortunately, because they do not understand what it is to live in the magnificence of the grace era with all the powers that that gives a person, they are very much at ease and at home in the world of Satan. But this was the case with Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah, wasn't it?

Lot wanted to be a good influence on Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact, he ran for political office. He ran for judge – one of the magistrates. And they elected him. They knew he was straight. He was not a homosexual, but they elected him. They found it great fun to have this man as a judge. And, in some degree, of course, they did say, "This guy is honest. This guy has integrity. We can trust him. We're not sure we can trust some of our fake little friends here.

So, that was the life of Lot being involved with the system. And God had taught him through Abraham: "Don't do that, Lot. Don't live there. Don't be involved in that world system. This one is very bad, because this is an enormous moral abomination, and God is going to judge it.

In Genesis 19:9, the angels came to tell Lot to take his family and get out, because the city was going to be burned to ashes, and I mean ashes. You can't find the place now. We know about where it was, but it was turned to dust, which is one reason why Babylon will be rebuilt, and will become the commercial center of the world. It will become the empire center of the antichrist, because Scriptures say that Babylon will someday be destroyed as was Sodom and Gomorrah. Well, we know very well where Babylon is. We have some of the buildings. Saddam Hussein hasn't been brought down by the nations of the world. Even the United States now looks the other way, and lets him keep working on his weaponry, and his biological weapons. He's going full blast now. But with all the money he can pour into it, he's rebuilding Babylon every day of the week. Someday, it's all going to be like Sodom and Gomorrah.

However, here these angels came and said, "God has had it. He's going to judge this homosexual community – these cities on the plain – get out. And the men of the city came, and started breaking down the door. They said, "We want your guests. We want to have them out here so we can rape them, and have sexual relations with these men. Let's have them."

**Alexander Pope**

Now, when you get out in the world, you get acclimated to it. When you start rubbing shoulders with the world, they don't look quite so bad to you. Remember, the famous lines from the writings of Alexander Pope, entitle An Essay on Man? In that essay, Alexander Pope says, "Sin is a monster of awful mean – that to be hated needs but to be seen, but seen too oft, familiar with face, first we endure, then pity, then embrace."

Why is it that Christians can accept the most vulgar, debasing immoralities in their own experience? Alexander Pope has hit right on target. They got used to it. They were associated with it. They were in a context where they got so used to it, that they endured it and they tolerated it. Then toleration turned to pity. And pity then turned to compassion. And they embraced it, and they became part of it.

That's what happened to poor Lot. He was so far down the line that, in this context, he says, "To these men, I have two daughters. They're virgins. Take them and have fun with them, but you can't treat my guests like that. They're under my care and my hospitality. And you know that that breaks one of the rules of good manners. And what did they say? These are the people that Lot is now enduring.

Genesis 19:9: "But they said, 'Stand aside.' Furthermore, they said, 'This one came in as an alien (referring to Lot), and already he's acting like a judge. Now we will treat you worse than them.' So, they pressed hard against Lot, and came near to breaking down the door." Here, he had been appointed a judge, and they say, "You're an alien. You're an outsider. You've come in here. Now, you're a judge over us. And now you're going to act as a judge here at the door, and tell us that we can't have these men. Step aside." And they started charging in. One of the angels reached out and grabbed Lot by the back of his neck garment; jerked him in the door; and, slammed the door. Then a terrible thing took place right there in the square. And you'll have to go home and read in chapter 19 to find out.

Lot was like Job, because the poor guy suffered. Lot did get out. Not all the family was willing to go. His son-in-law said, "You're crazy." Nothing's going to happen. So, he took his two daughters; took his wife; and, they headed out. And God said, "When I hit these cities, it's going to be an explosion. You're not even to show enough interest in them, because of the vulgarity of their homosexual-lesbian sins, that you're not even to look back. To look back is to express longing for having to have left.

Verse 26: "But his wife, from behind him (she's following Lot) looked back, and she became a pillar of salt." She really did. She became an old pillar of salt, just like that, just because she couldn't keep from looking back. Notice verse 33. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were done for. And Lot was left with his two daughters. They're hiding in a cave.

My point is that I want you to see the moral degeneracy of this man who had freedom of doctoral instruction with Abraham, and had been given great material prosperity. But Abraham had said, "You choose where you want to live, and I'll live with my herds and my family separately." And Lot, probably at his wife's instigation, goes for the big time glamorous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Now his girls had been reared in the context of Sodom and Gomorrah, just as much of a world system as it can be. They went to the Sodom and Gomorrah high school. They were in all the activities of the institutions of the city. Their father was a judge. This bore some prestige. There were up to their elbows in everything. These girls looked upon themselves now, and they were all alone; they had no future; they had no one to take care of them; and, no husbands.

**Lot's Daughters**

Verse 33: "They said, there is one way – we can get pregnant. Our father can do it, and we will have someone to care for us." These are the girls thinking now, who are supposed to be reared under a spiritual context? But the world that they lived in undermined it all. Verse 33: "So, they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and slept with their father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. It came about, on the morrow, that the firstborn said to the younger, "Behold, I slept last night with my father. Let us make him drink wine tonight also. Then you go in and sleep with him, that we may preserve our family through our father." And, incidentally, you will notice that drinking wine is not a really a cool thing to do.

Verse 35: "So, they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose." Verse 36: "Thus, both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father." From these two sons which were born, came the Moabites and the Ammonites, deadly enemies of the Jewish people.

So, hallelujah! Whitewashing the world is what brought Lot to the place that he was. Even in the Old Testament, we are cautioned to learn from the experience of Lot, but like the Bible says, "Let him who has an ear here." And that is very rare among Christians. Most of them don't have ears that can hear spiritual things. They have blockages, heavy with the wax of the world in their ears.

2 Peter 2:6-8 delineate what the judgments of God that inevitably come about. Verse 6 says that: "God said that if He condemned the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter to the homosexual community, and if he rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men." Lot himself was not a bad man. He was a man of biblical principles, and he was oppressed. (But he wanted to be one of their judges. He wanted to be out there helping to influence them for good. He was oppressed.) For by what he saw and heard, that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds. It wasn't a nothing thing with Lot. And he was tormented by it.

Why didn't he get out? Why didn't he say, "My Uncle Abraham was right? I did the wrong thing. Pack up, family. We're getting out of here. We're not going to be here, whitewashing Satan's world system. He didn't. And they lost.

Hebrews 11:13, in describing all these heroes of faith, says, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises. But having seen them, and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." There's the problem, Christians. We don't want to say, "I am a stranger and an exile. I don't belong as part of the institutions of the world. And I'm not going to put myself under your influence, and care, and authority, because I also know something else. Doctrine says, 'Let him that thinks that he stands to take, lest he fall.' I'm a solid Christian. I'm not going to go for this nonsense of the world." No? How many can you think of who said that, and were sucked in?

1 Peter 2:11: "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers." If you're going to be an alien and stranger, I urge you what? To observe the protocol, and: "To abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Well, if you are part of the world system, you will not restrain from fleshly lusts. You will not restrain from the lust patterns of the sin nature that war against your soul. You will be part of it. You cannot live in it, as Alexander Pope said, without first having some sense of enduring it – but not approving it; then pitying it; and, then you will embrace it.

Let's look at one more – the problem of violating the separation principles of the freedoms of the age of grace Philippians 3:17-21: "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk of whom I often told you (including believers), and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame; who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly await for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who transformed the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has, even to subject all things to Himself." Christian separation from the world system until God transforms you into the glorious image, physically, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, how should we respond to the question: how should I live now that I can saved? Why wallow around in the evil muck and the human viewpoint objectives of the world system? Why not live for Christ as the apple of the Father's eye, and a person after His Own Heart?

How should I now live? You cannot come to a true answer to that question, as a Christian, if you do not understand the doctrines of the dispensations – no arrogant, fruitless effort to Christianize the world. That is not what you are called to do.

The lifestyle in the church dispensation is unique in the course of human history. It is the greatest of all times to be born. It is a life of obedience to God the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit, who indwells us permanently; in fellowship with Jesus Christ, who lives within us; and, prospering us spiritually and materially. Got it? The more you grow into the grace way of life, and the more generous you are with what that life has brought to you, the greater you will prosper spiritually and materially – the time to have a life in God's service.

I see Christians all the time (stupendous people), who could make such a mark. They don't have time for it. They're up to their armpits in the world system, and in their time consumed with that. They don't have time for what goes on in God's work. Usually, they can't even have enough energy to arrive on time for what they do participate in. A life in God's service: personal joy; personal peace; personal godliness; and, doing your duty as a man or a woman in your family. In short, it means simply not doing something else with your time and your energy.

**Times and Epochs**

Now, the doctrine of dispensations, we have seen, in Acts 1:1-7 and in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, uses two significant words. The first word is the word "times." That refers to the succession of events in chronological order. Jesus also speaks about epochs which are coming. And that refers to an era of time with distinguishing characteristics. The word "dispensations" connotes the chronological succession of the dispensations in human history. This has been established by the decree of God: the sequence of divine administrations – God's plan for mankind. This is not arbitrarily imposed upon Scripture. This is an integral part of God's revelation, as we've seen in Acts 1:7 – times and epochs.

Many times, the Bible uses the word that refers to the concept of epochs of time that follow one another. Each epoch has distinct characteristics for a distinct purpose. The divine viewpoint of history is what we're talking about. The theological interpretation of history is what we're talking about. The dispensation reveals to believers who are living in some specific era (some specific dispensation), how then they are to live as saved people – how they are to orient themselves to the will of God; the plan of God; and, the purpose of God in their lives. How one lives after salvation is determined by what particular dispensation you live in. If you do not understand this doctrine, you'll never know where you fit in, and how you can live then. Knowledge of dispensations will enable the believer to divide and to apply God's truth accurate accurately.

2 Timothy 2:15 refers to this, when it says, "To divide (cut apart) the Word of God so that it is interpreted in an accurate way, so that someday you do not stand in heaven and be revealed as a fool who will believe the wrong thing. Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself." Where? At the Judgment Seat of Christ: "Approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of Truth." If you do not understand the doctrine of dispensation, you will never be able to accurately handle the Word of Truth. You'll always be applying things that belong to one dispensation into another.

Failure to distinguish the mystery of the church from Israel is one such example. This results in total disorientation from the magnificence of the grace age of the church, and prevents that Christian from maturing to the super-grace spiritual level. And that's the devil's purpose, isn't it? He does not want you to go to the super-grace living, where God can be pouring out the money, and the blessing, and the prosperity, and the good health, and the good times, and the significant, meaningful life of service upon you. Satan is not about to let you do that. Can you imagine what freedom, if you have that kind of resources, that you could do, on the impact of the work of God?

Salvation by grace through Jesus Christ is the same in every dispensation. Don't listen to these idiots who tell you that we just dispensationalists are teaching a different way of salvation in the different dispensation. No, everybody is saved just like Abraham, was the father of the Law system. Abraham believed God when He said, "I'm going to send you a Savior." He believe that in Ur of the Chaldees. And the Scripture says, "It was a counted to him as absolute righteousness."

Each dispensation reveals the glory of God, and man's total depravity, under varying conditions of life, so that it is demonstrated that he can never reach God and heaven by his efforts. That's the whole point. God said, "I'll let you live like this: first in the Garden of Eden, under those restrictions. Let's see what you can do with it. Then came the Law system. I gave you specific rules. Keep those. Because of the depravity of man (totally depraved), he can't do it. It breaks down. Now God comes to grace – the age of the church. I'm going to do it all for you. I'll get you to salvation. I'll get you the power system for living the Christian life. I'll give you everything you need. I'll give you a full canon of Scripture. I'll give you the relationships to Me personally in the Godhead, as no one ever had. You'll come right into the inner circle of My association? Let's see what you are going to do with it." But you look out, and you tell me what Christians are doing with it.

The words for "dispensation" in the New Testament are very specific words. "Dispensation" itself, which is used frequently in the King James translation of the Bible. In the New American standard, it's translated as "stewardship" or "administration," and it means the same thing. But the word "dispensation" itself comes from the Latin word "dispensatio," which is the word that was used when the Bible was translated from the Greek it into Latin (for the Romans). It's called the Latin Vulgate (the common Vulgate). "Vulgate" means common, like name "Koine" means common Greek. The common Bible, that Jerome translated for the Latin-speaking world, used this word "dispensation" every time he came to certain Greek words. Those included. Maybe we can get one this morning.

First of all, the word looks like this. It's the Greek word "oikonomia." This word is used nine times in the New Testament. In Luke 16:2-4, it is translated in the New American Standard as "stewardship." It can be translated as "dispensation."

In Ephesians 3:9, it is translated as "administration. In 1 Timothy 1:4, it is translated as "administration."

In 1 Corinthians 9:17, it is translated as "stewardship."

In Ephesians 1:10 it is translated as "administration."

In Ephesians 3:2, it is translated as "stewardship."

In Colossians 1:25, it is translated, as you know (in our passage here), as stewardship.

In all these passages, it is translated as "dispensation" in King James Bible. This word means "the administration of an estate or household." This means "supervision of an estate or a household." In the ancient world, large estates had administrators to run them for the masters. This word points out the fact that, during different periods of human history (dispensations), God administers the world in certain ways of His own choosing. And He does this through an agent who is responsible for carrying out his purposes in that era. "Oikonomia," or "economia" means an "administration of something during a certain period of time. It's a frequent word in Scripture. A dispensation isn't something that somebody invented. It comes right out of the Bible. And "oikonomia" is where we get the English word "economy," which also means the administration (a way of doing things) in a certain period. It's like "home economics," on cooking and house matters, and political economy. Those are all administrations.

Now, here's another word, along with it, that is the background of the word for "dispensations." This is the "oikonomos." This is this word is used ten times in the New Testament: Luke 12:42; Luke 16:1-8; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Galatians 4:2 (where it is translated as "managers" in the New American Standard); Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10 (where it is translated as "steward"); and, in Romans 16:23, it is translated as "treasure." What does this word mean? It means "a manager." It is the manager of a household. It is the manager of an administration. In each period of human history, God administers His Word (His household) through believers who are appointed as His stewards. That's the point.

It starts off with gentiles as the administrators of God's world under various phases. An "oikonomos" (the steward) supervises an "oikonomia." The steward supervises an era of administration. These divinely appointed administrators are called to account periodically for their administration.

Then there is one other word, and this is the verb which is involved. That's "oikonomeo." Luke 16:2 uses. It is used once only in the New Testament. It is a steward. It means to be a manager or a regulator. It is referring to the person who is controlling some administrative area.

We also have the word "aion," which means "age." This is used in Colossians 1:26. It refers to an era of time (an extended era of time). It's another word for administration.

In Hebrews 1:2, it's mistranslated as "world." It should be: "God created *time*," or "God created the *agency*" (dispensational administrations.

So, all these words indicate an administration (an era of time) by a steward who is responsible for supervising that arrangement of God's household. God says, "From this point on, to this point here." The one we live in is from the time of the day of Pentecost, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, to the time of the rapture of the church. Those are the boundaries of the administration; the economy; or, the dispensation in which we live. In that dispensation, Christians are the stewards. They are responsible for what happens. And in that dispensation, there are protocols; guidelines; and, rules. They are ways that you live.

Certainly, you would have to be a fool to say: "Our life today is just like the Old Testament administration under the Mosaic Law." It's not anything like it. It has nothing to do with it. It is totally different.

How then should I now live, now that I am saved? Find out the characteristics and the principles of the age of grace, and you know the answer to that.

Dear God, we thank You for the power and the structure of life of which we are a part. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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