

Romans - Commentaries by Cyrus Ingerson Scofield

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture, Believer's Standing and State

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

An important distinction to the right understanding of the Scriptures is that which concerns the standing (or position) of the believer, and his state (or walk). The first is the result of the work of Christ, and is perfect and entire from the very moment that Christ is received by faith. Faith alone confers standing in God's sight, and before Him the weakest, most ignorant, most infirm and fallible man on earth, if he be a true believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, has precisely the same title as the most illustrious saint.

What our standing is, may be seen in the following Scriptures: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:12). "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17).

"To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith" (1 Peter 1:4-5).

"Beloved now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2).

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9).

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal Life" (John 3:16).

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings" (Eph. 1:3).

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6).

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13).

"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" (1 Cor. 6:19).

Every one of these marvelous things is true of everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Not one item in this glorious inventory is gained by prayer, diligence in service, church-going, alms-giving, self-denial, holiness of life, or by any other description of good works. All are the gift of God, through Christ and therefore belong equally to all believers.

The very instant that the jailer of Philippi believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, he became a son of God, a joint heir with Christ, a king and priest, and the owner of an incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance. In the instant that he believed with his heart and confessed with his mouth, Jesus as Lord, he was justified from all things, had peace with God, a standing in His grace, and a sure hope of glory. He received the gift of eternal life, was made accepted in the full measure of Christ's own acceptance, was sealed with the Holy Spirit, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and was baptized into the mystical body of Christ. Instantly he was clothed with the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:22), quickened with Christ, raised with Him, and seated with Him in the heavenlies.

What his actual state may have been is quite another matter; certainly it was far, far below his exalted standing in the sight of God. It was not all at once that he became as royal, priestly, and heavenly in walk as he was at once in standing. The following passages will indicate the way these two things are constantly distinguished in the Scriptures.

Standing

"To the assembly of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints" (1 Cor. 1:2 JnD).

"But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:12-13).

State

"For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren... that there are contentions among you" (1 Cor. 1:11).

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal... For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

"Now some are puffed up" (1 Cor. 4:18).

"But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:8-9).

Notice that the divine order, under grace, is first to give the highest possible standing, and then to exhort the believer to maintain a state in accordance with it. The beggar is lifted up from the dunghill and set among princes (1 Sam. 2:8), and then exhorted to be princely. See the following as examples.

Standing

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed" (Rom. 6:6).

"Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14).

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace" (2 Tim. 1:9).

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).

"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8).

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him" (1 Thess. 5:9-10).

"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10).

State

"If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" (Col. 2:20).

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). "Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6).

"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thess. 5:11).

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1 Thess. 5:23).

"He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

Scripture makes a clear distinction between the standing and state of the believer. The believer is not under probation to see if he is worthy of an inconceivable exalted position, but beginning with the confession of utter unworthiness, receives the position wholly as the result of Christ's work. Positionally he is "perfected forever" (Heb. 10:14), but looking within, at his state, he must say, "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Phil. 3:12).

It may be said that all the after-work of God in his behalf the application of the Word to his walk and conscience (John 17:17; Eph. 5:26), the chastisements of the Father's hand (Heb. 12:10; 1 Cor. 11:32), the ministry of the Spirit (Eph. 4:11-12), all the difficulties and trials of the wilderness way (1 Peter 4:12-14), and the final transformation when He shall appear (1 John 3:2) all are intended simply to bring the believer's character into perfect conformity to the position which is his the instant of his conversion. He grows in grace, indeed, but not into grace.

A prince, while a little child, is presumably as willful and as ignorant as other little children. Sometimes he may be very obedient, teachable and affectionate, and then he is happy and approved. At other times he may be unruly, self-willed and disobedient, and then he is unhappy and perhaps is chastised. But he is just as much a prince on the one day as on the other. It may be hoped that, as time goes on, he will learn to bring himself into willing subjection to every right way, and then he will be more princely, but not any more really a prince. He was born a prince.

In the case of every true son of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, this growth into kingliness is assured. In the end, standing and state, character and position, will be equal. But the position is not the reward of the perfected character the character is developed from the position.

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture, Law and Grace

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

The most striking division of the Bible is that between law and grace. These contrasting principles characterize the two most important dispensations: the Jewish and Christian: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

It is not meant that there was no law before Moses, any more than that there was no grace and truth before Jesus Christ. The forbidding to Adam of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17) was law, but grace was manifested in the LORD'S seeking out His sinning creatures, and clothing them with coats of skins (Gen. 3:21), a beautiful type of Christ "made unto us... righteousness" (1 Cor. 1:30). Law (the revelation of God's will) and grace (the revelation of God's goodness) have always existed, and to this Scripture abundantly testifies. But "the law" most frequently mentioned in Scripture was given by Moses, and characterized the time from Sinai to Calvary; just as grace characterized the dispensation which begins at Calvary and has its predicted end in the rapture of the Church.

It is, however, most vital to observe that Scripture never, in any dispensation, mingles these two principles. Law always has a place and work distinct from that of grace. Law is God prohibiting and requiring; grace is God beseeching and bestowing. Law is a ministry of condemnation; grace is one of forgiveness. Law curses; grace redeems from that curse. Law kills; grace makes alive. Law shuts every mouth before God; grace opens every mouth to praise Him. Law puts a great and guilty distance between man and God; grace brings guilty man near to God. Law says, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"; grace says, "whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Law says, "Hate thine enemy"; grace says, "Love your enemies, bless them that despitefully use you." Law says, do and live; grace says, believe and live. Law never had a missionary, grace is to be preached to every creature. Law utterly condemns the best man; grace freely justifies the worst. (Luke 23:43; Rom. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Law is a system of probation; grace is one of favor. Law stones an adulteress, grace says, "Neither do I condemn thee." Under law the sheep dies for the shepherd; under grace the Shepherd dies for the sheep.

Everywhere the Scriptures present law and grace in sharp contrast. The mingling of them in much of the current teaching of the day spoils both, for law is robbed of its terror and grace of its freeness.

The student should observe that "law" in the New Testament Scriptures always means the law given by Moses (Rom. 7:23 being the only exception). But sometimes the whole law is meant; sometimes the commandments only; sometimes the ceremonial only. Passages referring to the first type are Rom. 6:14; Gal. 2:16, and 3:2. Verses referring to the second are Rom. 3:19 and 7:7-12. Col. 2:14-17 is an example of the third type. It should be remembered also that in the ceremonial law are enshrined those marvelous types the beautiful foreshadowings of the person and work of the Lord Jesus as priest (Ex. 25-30) and sacrifice (Lev. 1-7) which must ever be the wonder and delight of the spiritually minded.

Three Errors Concerning Law and Grace

1. Antinomianism denies all rule over the lives of believers. Those saved by God's free grace, wholly without merit, are not required to live holy lives. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Titus 1:16). "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our Lord into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).
2. Ceremonialism demands that believers should observe the Levitical ordinances. A modern form of this error teaches that Christian ordinances are essential to salvation: "And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1).
3. Galatianism mingles law and grace and teaches that justification is partly by grace, partly by law; or that grace is given to enable an otherwise hopeless sinner to keep the law. Against this most widespread of the three errors, God's strong warning, unanswerable logic and emphatic declaration comes in the Epistle to the Galatians: "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:2-3). "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ... but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ... let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-8).

The following may be helpful as an outline of Scripture teaching on this important subject of the moral law.

What the Law Is

"Wherefore the law is holy" (Rom. 7:12).

"The law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). "The law is good, if a man use it lawfully" (1 Tim. 1:8).

"And the law is not of faith" (Gal. 3:12).

The Lawful Use of the Law

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19).

"Now we know, that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19).

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10).

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

"The strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56).

It is evident, then, that God's purpose in giving the law (John 1:17; Gal. 3:17) was to bring to guilty man the knowledge of his sin and of his utter helplessness in view of God's just requirements. It is purely a ministration of condemnation and death.

What the Law Cannot Do

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

"No man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident; for, the just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11).

"And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39).

"For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God" (Heb. 7:19).

The Believer Not Under the Law

After declaring the doctrine of the believer's identification with Christ in His death, of which baptism is the symbol (Rom. 6:1-10), Rom. 6:11 begins the declaration of the principles which should govern the walk of the believer his rule of life. This is the subject of the rest of Rom. 6. Verse 14 gives the great principle of his deliverance, not from the guilt of sin that is met by Christ's blood, but from his bondage under it: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

Lest this should lead to the monstrous Antinomianism saying that a godly life was not important the Spirit immediately adds, "What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid" (Rom. 6:15). Surely every renewed heart answers, "Amen" to this.

Then Rom. 7 introduces another principle of deliverance from law: "Wherefore, my brethren ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:4).

"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal. 3:23-25).

The Believer's Rule of Life

"He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked" (John 2:6).

"Dearly beloved... abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

"Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:1-2).

"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us" (Eph. 5:1-2).

"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

"This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (1 John 3:22-23).

A beautiful illustration of this principle is seen in a mother's love for her child. The law requires parents to care for their offspring, with a penalty for the willful neglect of them; but the land is full of happy mothers who tenderly care for their children in perfect ignorance of this law. The law is in their hearts. In this connection, remember that God's appointed place for the tables of the law was within the ark of the testimony. With them were "the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded" (one a type of Christ, the other of resurrection, and both speaking of grace). They were covered from sight by the golden mercy-seat upon which was sprinkled the blood of atonement. The eye of God could see His broken law only through the blood that completely vindicated His justice and propitiated His wrath (Heb. 9:4-5).

God's Purpose in Grace

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13).

"That, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

"To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:6-7).

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

How all-inclusive! Grace saves, justifies, builds up, redeems, forgives, bestows an inheritance, gives standing, provides a throne which we may approach boldly for mercy and help, teaches us how to live, and gives us a blessed hope! Note that these diverse principles of law and grace cannot be intermingled.

"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:6).

"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:4-5; Gal. 3:16-18; 4:21-31).

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake). But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:18-24).

It is not, then, a question of dividing what God spoke from Sinai into "moral" and "ceremonial," because the believer does not come to that mount at all.

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