

William MacDonald:

Augustine once said, "Distinguish the ages and the Scriptures harmonize." God has divided all human history into ages: "... by whom also he made the ages" (Heb. 1:2 ERV margin). These ages may be long or short. What distinguishes them is not their length but the way in which God deals with mankind.

While God Himself never changes, His methods do. He works in different ways at different times. We sometimes speak of the way God administers His affairs with man during a particular era as a dispensation. Technically, a dispensation does not mean an age but rather an administration, a stewardship, an order, or an economy. But it is difficult for us to think of a dispensation without thinking of time. For example, the history of the United States government has been divided into various administrations. We speak of the Roosevelt administration, the Eisenhower administration, or the Kennedy administration. We mean, of course, the manner in which the government was operated while those presidents were in office. The important point is the policies that were followed, but we necessarily link those policies with a particular period of time.

Therefore, in this lesson we will think of a dispensation as the way in which God deals with men during any particular period of history. God's dispensational dealings may be compared to the way in which a home is run. When there are only a husband and wife in the home, a certain program is followed. But when there are several young children, an entirely new set of policies is introduced. As the children mature, the affairs of the home are handled differently again. We see this same pattern in God's dealings with the human race (Gal. 4:1-5).

For example, when Cain killed his brother Abel, God set a mark on him, so that anyone finding him would not put him to death (Gen. 4: 1-5). Yet after the Flood God instituted capital punishment, decreeing that "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6). Why the difference? Because there had been a change in dispensations.

Another example. In Psalm 137:8, 9 the writer calls down severe judgment on Babylon: O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones. Yet later the Lord taught His people:

Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you (Matt. 5:44).

It seems obvious that language suitable for the psalmist living under Law would no longer be suitable for a Christian living under grace.

Not all Christians are agreed on the number of dispensations or the names that should be given to them. In fact, not all Christians accept dispensations at all.

But we may demonstrate the existence of dispensations as follows. First of all, there are at least two dispensations-law and grace: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The fact that our Bibles are divided into Old and New Testaments indicates that a change of administration occurred. Further proof is given by the fact that believers in this age are not required to offer animal sacrifices; this too shows that God has introduced a new order.

But if we agree that there are two dispensations, we are forced to believe that there are three, because the Dispensation of Law was not introduced until Exodus 19, hundreds of years after Creation. So there must have been at least one dispensation before the Law (see Rom. 5:14). That makes three.

And then we should be able to agree on a fourth dispensation, because the Scriptures speak of "the age to come" (Heb. 6:5 RSV). This, of course, is the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will return to reign over the earth, otherwise known as the Millennium.

The Apostle Paul also distinguishes between the present age and an age to come. First he speaks of a dispensation that was committed to him in connection with the truth of the gospel and the Church (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3 :2; Col. 1:25). That is the present age. But then he also points forward to a future age when, in Ephesians 1: 10, he refers to "the dispensation of the fulness of times." It is apparent from his description of it that it has not yet arrived.

So we know that we are not living in the final age of the world's history.

Dr. C. I. Scofield, editor of the Scofield Reference Bible, lists seven dispensations, as follows:

Innocence (Gen. 1:28). From Adam's creation up to his fall.

Conscience or Moral Responsibility (Gen. 3:7). From the fall to the end of the Flood.

Human Government (Gen. 8:15). From the end of the Flood to the call of Abraham.

Promise (Gen. 12:1). From the call of Abraham to the giving of the Law.

Law (Exod. 19:1). From the giving of the Law to the Day of Pentecost.

Church (Acts 2:1). From the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture.

Kingdom (Rev. 20:4). The thousand-year reign of Christ.

In his chart, "The Course of Time from Eternity to Eternity," A. E. Booth sees seven dispensations of human history foreshadowed in the seven days of Genesis:

First day-Man tested with the light of creation-light and promise.
 Second day-Government (from the Flood to the dividing of the nations).
 Third day-Israel (from Abraham to the end of the Gospels).
 Fourth day-Grace (a parenthesis period).
 Fifth day-The Tribulation.
 Sixth day-The Millennium.
 Seventh day-Eternity.

While it is not important to agree on the exact details, it is quite important to see that there are different dispensations. The distinction between law and grace is especially important. Otherwise we will take portions of Scripture that apply to other ages and refer them to ourselves. While all Scriptures are profitable for us (2 Tim. . 3:16), not all were written directly to us. Passages dealing with other ages have applications for us, but their primary interpretation is for the age for which they were written. For example, Jews living under the Law were forbidden to eat the meat of any unclean animal, that is, one that did not have a cloven hoof and did not chew the cud (Lev. 11:3). This prohibition is not binding on Christians today (Mark 7:18, 19), but the underlying principle remains -that we should avoid moral and spiritual uncleanness.

God promised the people of Israel that if they obeyed Him, He would make them materially prosperous (Deut. 28:1 -6). The emphasis then was on material blessings in earthly places. But this is not true today. God does not promise that He will reward our obedience with financial prosperity. Instead, the blessings of this dispensation are spiritual blessings in the heavenly places (Eph, 1:3).

While there are differences among the various ages, there is one thing that never changes, and that is the gospel. Salvation always has been, is now, and always will be by faith in the Lord. And the basis of salvation for every age is the finished work of Christ on Calvary's Cross. People in the Old Testament were saved by believing whatever revelation the Lord gave them. Abraham, for example, was saved by believing God when He said that the patriarch's seed would be as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:5, 6). Abraham did not know much, if anything, about what would take place at Calvary centuries later. But God knew. And when Abraham believed the Lord, He put to Abraham's account all the value of the future work of Christ at Calvary.

Someone has said that the Old Testament saints were saved "on credit." That is to say, they were saved on the basis of the price that the Lord Jesus would pay many years later (that is the meaning of Romans 3:25). We are saved on the basis of the work which Christ accomplished over 1900 years ago. But in both cases salvation is by faith in the Lord.

We must guard against any idea that people in the Dispensation of Law were saved by keeping the Law or even by offering animal sacrifices. The Law can only condemn; it cannot save (Rom. 3:20). And the blood of bulls and goats cannot put away a single sin (Heb. 10,4). No! God's way of salvation is by faith and faith alone! (See Romans 5:1.)

Another good point to remember is this: when we speak of the present age as being the Age of Grace, we do not imply that God was not gracious in past dispensations. We simply mean that God is now testing man under grace rather than under law. This distinction will be explained more fully in a future lesson.

It is also important to realize that the ages do not close with split-second precision. Often there is an overlapping or a transition period. We see this in the Book of Acts, for instance; it took awhile for the new Church to throw off some of the trappings of the previous dispensation. And it is possible that there will be a period of time between the Rapture and the Tribulation during which the Man of Sin will be manifested and the Temple will be erected in Jerusalem.

One final word. Like all good things, the study of dispensations can be abused. There are some Christians who carry dispensationalism to such an extreme that they accept only Paul's Prison Epistles as applicable for the Church today! As a result they do not accept baptism or the Lord's supper, since these are not found in the Prison Epistles. They also teach that Peter's gospel message was not the same as Paul's. (See Galatians 1:8, 9 for a refutation of this.) These people are sometimes called ultra-dispensationalists or Bullingerites (after a teacher named E. W. Bullinger). Their extreme view of dispensations should be rejected.

TWO COMINGS OF CHRIST

To understand and enjoy the Scriptures, it is necessary to differentiate between the first and second comings of Christ. His First Coming refers, of course, to His birth as a baby in Bethlehem's manger. The Second Coming points forward to the time when He will return. The first is concerned with the sufferings of Christ, the second with the glory that will follow (1 Peter 1:11).

In this chapter we will present Christ's Second Coming in a general way, presenting only the simple fact that the Savior is coming again. In the next chapter we will see that there are several phases to His Second Coming.

The Old Testament prophets foresaw the coming of the Messiah, but they were confused by what they saw. The Spirit of God revealed to them that the Christ would come in both humiliation and glory. He would suffer, bleed, and die, but He would also triumph over all His foes. They could not reconcile this. What they didn't realize was that they were dealing with two distinct advents of the Messiah, with more than 1900 years between them.

Oftentimes the two comings are merged together in the Bible with no indication of an intervening time period. If we can learn to detect these quick transitions, it will add greatly to our pleasure and profit. Here are some examples.

The first twenty-one verses of Psalm 22 clearly refer to the First Advent; they depict the sufferings of the Savior on the Cross. But there is a distinct break between verses 21 and 22. The last ten verses of the psalm point forward to the victory and glory of the Second Advent.

We also find the two comings in Isaiah 9:6, 7:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

The coming to Bethlehem is described by the words "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given..." All the rest of the verses point forward to the time when He will return to reign in power and great glory.

The two advents are also found in Isaiah 49:7:

Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

The first advent is apparent in the words "to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers," but the rest of the verse points unmistakably to His second coming.

Now notice Isaiah 52:14, 15:

Even as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him, for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Verse 14 obviously describes the Savior on the Cross; those who watched the Crucifixion were astonished at the depths of His suffering. He was so disfigured that He was no longer recognizable as a man. But there is a tremendous contrast in verse 15. When the Savior comes back, men will be astonished at the brilliance of His glory. The nations will be startled to see the lowly Stranger of Galilee returning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

One of the best-known examples of a passage where the two advents are blended is Isaiah 61:1, 2:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn.

When Jesus was in the synagogue in Nazareth He quoted from these verses (Luke 4:18, 19). But notice that He stopped with the words "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." He did not continue to the expression, "and the day of vengeance of our God." Why? Because His First Advent ushered in the acceptable year of the Lord. His Second Advent will begin "the day of vengeance of our God."

We have a similar illustration of the two advents in Psalm 34:15, 16:

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

When Peter quotes these verses in 1 Peter 3:12 he stops short of the words "to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." All the rest of the quotation applies to the age in which we are now living, but this final expression looks forward to the Second Advent of Christ.

The prophet Micah foretold that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah (Mic. 5:2):

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

But then Micah quickly skipped over to Christ's Second Coming, when He will be great unto the ends of the earth (Mic. 5:4):

And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

In Zechariah 9:9 we have an obvious prediction of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem:

Rejoice greatly, o daughter of Zion; shout, o daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

But the next verse carries us forward to the Second Coming, when Christ will reign from sea to sea:

And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace unto the heathen, and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.

We find the two comings merged in the New Testament as well as in the Old. Take Luke 1:31-33, for example: And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father

David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

The first verse was obviously fulfilled when Jesus was born (see Matt. 1:25). But verses 32 and 33 pass over this present Church Age to the time when Christ will return to sit upon the throne of David and to rule over the earth.

There is a veiled reference to the two advents in Luke 20:18:

Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

In the first part of the verse, the stone (Christ) is on the earth. During His Incarnation men fell on Him and were broken. In the second half of the verse, the stone is coming down from above. When Christ comes back He will scatter the disobedient as dust.

A final and more obvious instance of the combination of the two comings is found in Hebrews 9:26, 28:

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.... So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

He appeared once to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; that was His First Advent. He will appear the second time without sin unto salvation; that is when He comes again.

PHASES OF CHRIST'S RETURN

In the previous lesson we saw that it is necessary to differentiate between the first and second advents of Christ. The first belongs to history; it took place almost 2000 years ago. The second belongs to prophecy; it is still future.

But it is necessary to realize that the Second Coming of Christ is not a single event. Rather, it stretches over a period of time and has four stages or phases. So in this lesson we want to distinguish these phases.

In the original language of the New Testament the common word for "coming" means "a presence" or "a coming alongside." It denotes an arrival and a subsequent presence. It was commonly used in connection with the arrival of a king and the visit that followed.

Even in the English language the word "coming" is used in this way. For instance, Christ's coming to Galilee brought healing to multitudes. Here we do not mean simply the day He arrived in Galilee, but the whole period of time He spent in that area.

So when we think of Christ's Second Coming we should think of a period of time rather than an isolated event. This period of time has four stages, as follows:

1. A beginning
2. A course
3. A manifestation
4. A climax

1. The Beginning of Christ's Coming

The beginning of Christ's Coming is the Rapture, that is, the Coming of Christ for His saints. He will come to the air, the dead in Christ will be raised, living believers will be changed, and all will go to the Father's house. This could take place at any moment and will take place in a moment of time.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then they that are Christ's at his coming (1 Cor. 15:22, 23 ERV).

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18 ERV).

Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him (2 Thess. 2:1 ERV).

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:7, 8 ERV).

And now, my little children, abide in him, that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming (1 John 2:28 ERV).

Other passages which refer to the Rapture are John 14:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; Philippians 3:20, 21; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 9:28; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:7, 20.

2. The Course of Christ's Coming

The second stage, the course of Christ's coming, includes the Judgment Seat of Christ, when rewards will be given to believers for faithful service.

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye before our Lord Jesus at his coming? (1 Thess. 2:19 ERV).

And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:23 ERV).

See also Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:7, 8.

Another event which should probably be included in the course of Christ's Coming is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. From its location in the Book of Revelation we know it will take place prior to Christ's glorious reign. We include it here even if the word "coming" is not used in connection with it.

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are true words of God (Rev. 19:6-9 ERV).

While these events are taking place in heaven the earth will be experiencing a time of tribulation. This will be a period of approximately seven years during which God will pour out judgments of ever-increasing intensity upon the earth (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:4-28; Rev. 6-19). The last half of the period is known as the Great Tribulation; it will witness distress and disasters of unprecedented severity (Matt. 24:15-31).

3. The Manifestation of Christ's Coming

The third phase is the manifestation of Christ's coming, that is, His return to earth in power and great glory to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Rapture will not be seen by the world; it will take place in a split second. But every eye will see Christ when He comes to reign. Therefore it is called the manifestation of His coming. This is the third phase of His coming.

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matt. 24:3 ERV).

For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of man (Matt. 24:27 ERV).

And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man (Matt. 24:37 ERV).

And they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man (Matt. 24:39 ERV).

To the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints (1 Thess. 3:13 ERV).

And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming (2 Thess. 2:8 ERV).

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Pet. 1:16 ERV). (Here Peter is speaking about the manifestation of Christ's coming as it was pre-pictured on the Mount of Transfiguration.)

Other references to this third stage of Christ's coming are Zechariah 14:4; Malachi 4:1-3; Acts 1:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Jude 14; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-16.

4. The Climax of Christ's Coming

The final stage is the climax of Christ's coming, the destruction of the heavens and earth by fire. It follows the thousand year reign of Christ on earth. It is referred to in 2 Peter 3:4, 7-13:

And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For from the day that the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.... But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But,

beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat! Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

In this chapter we read of scoffers who will arise in the last days, denying the probability of Christ's Return. What aspect of His coming do they mean?

Are they referring to the Rapture? No. They probably know nothing about the Rapture. Are they referring to Christ's Coming to Reign? No. It is apparent that they are not. The entire context indicates that what they are ridiculing is the final punishment of all evil doers by the Lord. They mean a last climactic judgment of God on the earth, or what they call "the end of the world." Their argument is that they have nothing to worry about. God hasn't intervened in history and He won't intervene in the future. So they feel free to continue in their evil words and deeds.

Peter answers their scoffing by pointing forward to the time, after the thousand-year reign of Christ, when the heavens and the earth as we now know them will be utterly destroyed. This climax of Christ's coming will occur after the Millennium and at the inauguration of the Eternal State.

"But," someone may ask, "How do you know that the first and third stages, the Rapture and Revelation, are separate events?" The answer is that they are differentiated in the Scriptures in the following ways:

The Rapture The Revelation

1. Christ comes to the air (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).
2. He comes for His saints (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).
3. The Rapture is a mystery, i.e., a truth unknown in Old Testament times (1 Cor. 15:51).
4. Christ's Coming for His saints is never said to be preceded by signs in the heavens.
5. The Rapture is identified with the Day of Christ (1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10).
6. The Rapture is presented as a time of blessing (1 Thess. 4:18).
7. The Rapture takes place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:52). This strongly implies that it will not be witnessed by the world.
8. The Rapture seems to involve the Church primarily (John 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).
9. Christ comes as the Bright and Morning Star (Rev. 22:16).
1. He comes to the earth (Zech. 14:4).
2. He comes with His saints (1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14).
3. The Revelation is not a mystery; it is the subject of many Old Testament prophecies (Psa. 72; Isa. 11; Zech. 14).
4. Christ's Coming with His saints will be heralded by signs in the heavens. (Matt. 24:29, 30).
5. The Revelation is identified with the Day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:1-12, ASV).
6. The main emphasis of the Revelation is on judgment (2 Thess. 2:8-12).
7. The Revelation will be visible worldwide (Matt. 24:27; Rev. 1:7).
8. The Revelation involves Israel primarily, then also the Gentile nations (Matt. 24:1-25:46).
9. Christ comes as the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings (Mal. 4:2).

LAW AND GRACE

Law and grace are two opposite ways in which God deals with the human race. We can describe them as dissimilar principles under which He tests man. Or we think of them as two covenants that He has made with His people: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Under the principle of law, man receives what he earns or deserves. Under grace he is spared from what he deserves and is enriched beyond description—all as a free gift. The two principles are described in Romans 4:4, 5:

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.

Grace and law are mutually exclusive; that is, they cannot be mixed..... If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace" (Rom. 11:6).

Law is a conditional covenant: God says, "If you obey, I will reward you, but if you disobey, I must punish you." Grace is an unconditional covenant: God says, "I will bless you freely."

The law says Do, whereas grace says Believe. But believing is not a condition; it is the only reasonable response of a creature to his Creator. And it is not meritorious; no one can be proud that he has believed on the Lord. He would be foolish not to believe on the only dependable Person in the universe.

Under law holiness is required but no power is given to live a holy life. Under grace holiness is taught (Tit. 2:11, 12) and the necessary power is given. Someone has put it this way: "The Law demands strength from one who has none and curses him if he can't display it. Grace gives strength to one who has none and blesses him in the exhibition of it."

The Law brings a curse: "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). Grace brings a blessing: " Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

Under law boasting is encouraged, but under grace it is ruled out. "Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith" (Rom. 3:27 RSV).

There cannot be any assurance of salvation under law: a man could never know whether he had performed enough good works or the right kind of good works. Under grace there is full assurance because salvation is a gift; you know when you have received a gift!

A person under law could not have true security because he could not be sure he would continue to meet the requirements. Under grace the believer enjoys eternal security (John 10:27-29) because his salvation depends on the work of Christ.

There is no salvation by the law. God never intended that anyone would ever be saved on that principle. The purpose of the Law is to show man that he is a sinner. " By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20) -not the knowledge of salvation.

Salvation is by grace (Eph. 2:8,9). It is the free, undeserved gift of God to those who receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their only hope for heaven.

Under law sin is aroused (Rom. 7:8-13); under grace it is despised. When sinful man is put under law he immediately wants to do what is forbidden. It is not the law's fault, but the response of sin in man's nature. Under grace, sin is despised. The memory of what our sins cost the Savior makes us turn away from them.

Under law the work is never finished. That is why the Sabbath, the seventh day, came at the end of a week of toil. Grace tells us of a finished work, so we begin our week with the Lord's Day, our day of rest.

The Law tells what man must do. Grace reveals what God has done in Christ.

The Law is a system of bondage (Gal. 4:1-3); grace is a system of liberty (Gal. 5:1). Men under law are servants; men under grace are sons.

The Law says, "Thou shalt love." Grace says, "God so loved..."

The Law says, "Do and thou shalt live." Grace says, "Live and thou shalt do."

The Law says, "Try and obey." Grace says, "Trust and obey."

Under law a wayward son was taken outside the city and stoned to death (Deut. 21:18-21). Under grace the prodigal son can confess his sin and come back into the fellowship of his father's house again (Luke 15:21-24).

Under law the sheep die for the shepherd. Under grace the shepherd dies for the sheep (John 10:11).

The superiority of grace has been described as follows: grace is not looking for good men whom it may approve, for it is not grace but justice to approve goodness; but it is looking for condemned, guilty, speechless, and helpless men whom it may save, sanctify, and glorify.

THREE TENSES OF SALVATION

When we first become Christians most of us can think of only one type of salvation, the salvation of our souls. In our Bible study we automatically try to fit this meaning into every occurrence of the word. But soon we find that it will not always fit.

Then we come to realize that salvation is a very general word meaning deliverance, safety, or soundness. In Philippians 1: 19, for example, Paul uses it concerning his expected release from prison:

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 2:12 salvation means something quite different; it means the solution of a problem that had broken out in the church at Philippi. A serious case of disunity had arisen (Phil. 2:1-4; 4:2). Paul reminds the Christians that the answer to the problem was for them all to have the humble, self-sacrificing mind of the Lord Jesus. Then in verse 12 he says:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

In other words, "I have told you the way of deliverance from the problem that vexes you. Now work out the solution with fear and trembling.

In three passages salvation is used to describe deliverance from drowning:

And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved (Acts 27:30, 31).

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house (Heb. 11:7).

...he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight, persons were saved through water (1 Pet. 3:19, 20 RSV).

But the uses of the words "salvation" or "saved" in which we are principally interested are those which have to do with deliverance from sin. This is the most common meaning in the New Testament.

Here we must learn to distinguish the three tenses of salvation-past, present, and future:

Past-I was saved from the penalty of sin.

Present-I am being saved from the power of sin.

Future-I shall be saved from the presence of sin.

Past Tense

Here are some verses which speak primarily of salvation from the penalty of sin:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8 RSV).

(God) who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Tit. 3:5).

Note: In these three examples the word "saved" is in the past tense. However, there are other verses which speak of our deliverance from the penalty of sin where the verb is not in the past tense.

Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (Rom. 10:9).

So you must decide by the contents of the verse rather than by the tense of the verb whether the past tense of salvation is meant. If the subject is the once-for-all deliverance from the condemnation of sin, then you know it is the past tense of salvation.

Present Tense

Although it is true that I have been saved, it is equally true that I am being saved day by day. I have been saved from damnation; I am being saved from damage. I have been saved from the penalty of sin; I am being saved from the power of sin. I have been saved through the finished work of Christ on the Cross; I am being saved through His life and ministry for me at the right hand of God. That is what is meant, for example, in Romans 5:10:

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life.

The present tense of salvation is much the same as sanctification-the process of being separated to God from sin and defilement. It is this salvation as a continuing process that we read about in Hebrews 7:25:

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Future Tense

Finally, there is the future aspect of salvation. When we meet the Savior face-to-face we shall be saved from sin's presence. Our bodies will be redeemed and glorified. The following verses describe the glorious-future consummation of our salvation.

For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed (Rom. 13:11).

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:8,

Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:28).

(You) who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:5).

All Three Tenses

If you have difficulty fitting a verse into one of these classes, remember that it might be applicable to all three tenses. Here are a couple of examples:

Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

In him you also who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13 RSV).

So in cases like these you don't have to choose, because they apply with equal force to all three phases of salvation.

JUDICIAL AND PARENTAL FORGIVENESS

Two different kinds of forgiveness are found in the Scriptures, and if we are going to be careful students of the Word, we must learn to distinguish them. We will call them judicial and parental forgiveness (though these names themselves are not used in the Bible).

To put it very simply, judicial forgiveness is the forgiveness of a judge and parental forgiveness is the forgiveness of a father. The first term is taken from the courtroom and the second from the home.

First let us go to the courtroom. God is the Judge and sinful man is the person on trial. Man is guilty of sinning, and the penalty is eternal death. But the Lord Jesus appears and announces, "I will pay the penalty which man's sins deserved; I will die as a Substitute for him!" This is what the Savior did on the Cross of Calvary. Now the Judge announces to sinful man, -if you will surrender to my Son as your Lord and Savior, I will forgive you." As soon as the man puts his faith in the Savior, he receives judicial forgiveness of all his sins.

He will never have to pay the punishment for them in hell, because Christ has. paid it all. The forgiven sinner now enters into a new relationship: God is no longer his Judge; now He is his Father.

So now we move into the home for an illustration of parental forgiveness. God is the Father and the believer is the child. In an unguarded moment, the child commits an act of sin. Then what happens? Does God sentence the child to die for the sin? Of course not, because God is no longer the Judge, but the Father! What does happen? Well, fellowship in the family is broken. The happy family spirit is gone. The child has not lost his salvation, but he has lost the joy of his salvation. Soon he may experience the discipline of his Father, designed to bring him back into fellowship. As soon as the child confesses his sin, he receives parental forgiveness.

Judicial forgiveness takes place once-for-all at the time of conversion; parental forgiveness takes place every time a believer confesses and forsakes his sin. This is what Jesus taught in John 13:8-10: we need the bath of regeneration only once to deliver us from the penalty of sins, but we need many cleansings throughout our Christian lives to give us parental forgiveness.

The difference between the two types of forgiveness may be summarized graphically as follows:

Judicial	Parental
The Person's Status	Sinner
(Romans 3:23)	Child
(1 John 3:2)	
Relationship of God	Judge
(Psa. 96:13)	Father
(Gal. 4:6)	
Result of sin	Eternal death
(Rom. 6:23)	Broken fellowship
(1 John 1:6)	
Role of Christ	Savior
(1 Tim. 1:15)	High Priest and Advocate
(Heb. 4:14-16; 1 John 2:1)	
The Person's Need	Salvation
(Acts 16.30)	Joy of salvation
(Psa. 51:12)	
Means of Forgiveness	Faith
(Acts 16:31)	Confession
(1 John 1:9)	
Kind of Forgiveness	Judicial
(Rom. 8:1)	Parental
(Luke 15:21,22)	
Consequence Averted	Hell

(John 5:24) Chastening
 (1 Cor. 11:31, 32)
 Loss of reward at the Judgment Seat Of Christ
 (1 Cor. 3:15)
 Positive Result New relationship
 (John 1 :12) Renewed fellow-ship
 (Psa. 32:5)
 Frequency Once (One bath of regeneration)
 (John 13;10) Many times (many cleansings)
 (John 13:8)

From now on, when we come to verses that speak about the once-for-all forgiveness that is granted to us as sinners through the work of Christ, we will know that the subject is judicial forgiveness. The following illustrate this:

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:7).

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4:32 RSV).

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Col. 2:13).

However, there are other passages of Scripture that deal with parental forgiveness:

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:14, 15).

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven (Luke 6:37).

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses (Mark 11:25).

Notice that in two of these verses God is specifically mentioned as Father: it is the Father's forgiveness that is involved. Notice also that our being forgiven depends on our willingness to forgive others. That is not true of judicial forgiveness; willingness to forgive others is not a condition of salvation. But it is true of parental forgiveness; our Father will not forgive us if we don't forgive one another.

In Matthew 18:23-35 The Lord Jesus told the story of a slave who had been forgiven 10,000 talents by the king. But that same slave wouldn't forgive one of his fellow-slaves 100 pence. The king was therefore angry with him and delivered him to the jailers till he paid all his debt. The Lord Jesus concluded the parable by saying, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Here again it is a matter of the Father's forgiveness. It is sin to have an unforgiving spirit, and God cannot forgive us parentally until we confess that sin and forsake it.

One of the thrills of Bible study is to see these basic distinctions and to be able to apply them in our daily reading. From now on when you come to the subject of forgiveness in the Word you should be able to say, "Oh, yes, that refers to judicial forgiveness" or else "that must refer to the Father's forgiveness of His child."

KINDS OF SANCTIFICATION

The word "sanctify" means "to set apart". There is a whole family of words-sanctify, sanctification, saint, holy, holiness, consecrate, consecration-that all have the same root meaning. Very often sanctification means the process of separating from common or unclean uses to divine service. But not always. If you just remember that to sanctify means to set apart, you will have a definition that fits all cases.

In the Old Testament God sanctified the seventh day (Gen. 2:3). The firstborn of both men and animals were sanctified to the Lord (Exod. 13:2). The priests were told to consecrate themselves to the Lord (Exod. 19:22). The Tabernacle and all its furniture were sanctified (Exod. 40:9).

In the New Testament sanctification is used primarily in regard to people. However, The Lord Jesus said that the Temple sanctifies the gold on it, and that the altar sanctifies the gift on it (Matt. 23:17, 19). Paul taught that when we give thanks for our food, it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer (1 Tim. 4:5).

With regard to the sanctification of persons, God consecrated Christ and sent Him into the world (John 10:36); that is, the Father set apart His Son for the work of saving us from our sins. The Lord Jesus consecrated Himself (John 17:19); in other words, He set Himself apart in order to intercede for His people.

There is even a sense in which certain unbelievers are sanctified. "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband" (1 Cor. 7:14). This means that the

unbelieving partner is set apart in a position of privilege by having a Christian spouse praying for his salvation.

And there is a sense in which Christ should be sanctified by all believers. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . (1 Pet. 3:15). We sanctify Him by setting Him apart as undisputed Sovereign in our lives.

In addition to the above, however, there are four other important kinds of sanctification which we should distinguish in our study of the New Testament. These are called pre-conversion sanctification, positional sanctification, progressive sanctification, and perfect sanctification.

Pre-Conversion Sanctification

Long before a person is born again, the Holy Spirit has been working in his life, setting him apart from the world to belong to Christ. Paul realized that he had been set apart before he was born (Gal. 1:15). In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, the Apostle reminds the Thessalonians that there were three steps in their salvation:

1. Their selection by God.
2. Their sanctification by the Spirit.
3. Their belief in the truth.

Notice that this sanctification was before they believed and were saved.

In 1 Peter 1:2, the order of events connected with salvation is linked as follows:

1. Choice and destiny by God the Father.
2. Sanctification by the Spirit.
3. Obedience to Jesus Christ.
4. Sprinkling with His blood.

In eternity God chose us to belong to Himself. In time the Holy Spirit set us apart for the Lord. Then we obeyed the gospel. As soon as we did, all the value of the shed blood of Christ was credited to our account. But the point to notice here is that the sanctification Peter speaks of is a kind that takes place before a person is born again.

Positional Sanctification

The moment a person is born again he becomes positionally sanctified. This means that as far as his standing before God is concerned, he is perfectly set apart to God from the world because he is "in Christ." In a very real sense Christ is his sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30).

Every true believer is a saint; he has been separated to the Lord. This is his position. Thus in 1 Corinthians 1:2 all the Christians in the local church in Corinth are described as sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. " They weren't always very saintly. They tolerated sin in the fellowship (1 Cor. 5:1, 2). They went to law against one another (1 Cor. 6:1). They had teachers who denied the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:33, 34). But it was still true of them that as far as their position was concerned, they were saints-sanctified in Christ Jesus.

Now let us look at some of the passages that deal with positional sanctification. In Acts 20:32, the expression "all them which are sanctified" means all believers. In Acts 26:18 the Lord described His people as those "which are sanctified by faith that is in me." The Corinthians are described as having been "washed ... sanctified ... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6: 11). And the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

Positional sanctification is also indicated at times by the use of the word "holy." Thus in Colossians 3:12, when Paul addresses the Christians as "holy," he is referring to their standing before God.

Progressive Sanctification

While there are many Scriptures which say that all Christians are sanctified, there are many others which say that they should be sanctified. If we fail to distinguish the kinds of sanctification, we can find this very confusing.

Progressive or practical sanctification refers to what we should be in our everyday lives. We should be living lives of separation to God from sin and evil. Saints should be becoming more saintly all the time.

It was this aspect of sanctification that the Lord Jesus referred to in John 17:17 when He prayed for His own, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

The believer's cooperation is involved in this (2 Tim. 2:21). Wherever you find exhortations concerning sanctification or holiness you can be sure that the subject is practical sanctification. Thus Paul urged the Corinthians, " - . . let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). And in the same vein Peter wrote, ". . . as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:15).

One particular form of practical sanctification concerns separation from immorality. "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour" (1 Thess. 4:3, 4).

How does a Christian become more holy, more like the Lord Jesus? The answer is found in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Practical holiness comes from being occupied with the Lord. It is a principle in life that we become like what we worship. The more we behold Christ, the more we become like Him. The Holy Spirit works this marvelous transformation-not all at once, but from one degree of glory to another!

Perfect Sanctification

This aspect of sanctification is still future for the believer. When he sees the Savior face-to-face he will be forever set apart from all sin and defilement. He will be morally like the Lord Jesus-perfectly sanctified.

This is what we read about in Colossians 1:22: "In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight."

In that day the Church will have its ultimate sanctification: "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

Other passages describe our perfect sanctification without mentioning the word. John, for instance, says, ". . . we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). And Jude reminds us that our Lord will present us "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

Now it will be extremely helpful in your study of the Bible to distinguish these various aspects of sanctification. Whenever you find words that deal with holiness, ask yourself, "Is this what happened before conversion? Is this what I am in Christ? Is this what I should be day by day? Or is this what I will be when I am ushered into the glorious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ?"

ASPECTS OF JUSTIFICATION

The New Testament teaches that we are justified by grace, by faith, by blood, by power, and by works. This is apt to prove confusing, if not contradictory, unless we realize that in each case a different aspect of the same subject is being presented.

First of all, what does justification mean? To justify means to reckon righteous. It does not mean to make righteous, but to declare to be righteous. Actually it is a legal term; it comes from the courtroom.

We are not righteous in ourselves. We have no righteousness. But when we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, God reckons us to be righteous on the basis of Christ's substitutionary work. When we are "in Christ," God can righteously declare us to be righteous because full satisfaction has been made at Calvary for all our sins. The believing sinner is clothed in all the righteousness of God. "For he (God) hath made him (Christ) to be sin for us, (He) who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

As we mentioned at the outset, justification is said to be by grace, by faith, by blood, by power, and by works. How can it be by all these five ways?

First, justification is by grace. In Romans 3:24 we read, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This means that man does not deserve to be justified. He cannot merit it or earn it; he must receive it as a gift. Grace is the term upon which God gives justification to man-completely undeserved and unbought-freely, as a gift.

Second, justification is by faith, "Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). This means that the sinner must receive justification by a definite act of trust in the Savior. Confessing himself to be worthy only of hell, he must accept the Lord Jesus as the One who paid the penalty of his sins on the Cross.

Grace is God stooping down to guilty man and offering justification as a free gift on the basis of Christ's redemptive work at Calvary. Faith is repentant man reaching up and receiving the gift from God without any thought of deserving it by his character or earning it by his works.

Justification is also by blood. "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:9). This, of course, refers to the price which had to be paid in order that I might be justified. The sinless Savior shed His precious blood to settle the debt that my sins had accumulated. The enormous value of my justification is seen in the staggering price that was paid to secure it.

While there is no Scripture that says in so many words that we are justified by power, the truth is contained in Romans 4:25: "(He) was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Here our justification is directly connected with the Resurrection of Christ. And rightly so! If He had not risen our faith would be futile, and we would still be in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17). So our justification is inseparably linked with the power that raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. That is why we say that we are justified by power.

Finally, we are justified by works. "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). Here is where a distinct contradiction seems to appear. The Apostle Paul teaches unmistakably that we are justified by faith alone. But James seems to say here, "Not so. We are justified by faith and by

works." However, that is not what James is saying. He does not teach that justification is obtained initially by doing good works. Neither does he say that we are justified by faith plus works. What he is saying is that we are justified by the kind of faith that results in a life of good works.

It is futile for a man to say he has faith if he doesn't have works to back it up. That kind of faith-that is, a faith of words only, is worthless (James 2:14-17). True faith is invisible but can be demonstrated by works (James 2:18). Abraham was justified by believing the Lord (Gen. 15:6), but years later he showed that his faith was genuine by being willing to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:9-14). Rahab proved the reality of her faith by harboring the Israeli spies and helping them escape (James 2:25). So when we speak of justification by works we mean that works are the outward manifestation that we have truly been justified by faith. Works are not the cause; they are the effect. They are not the root; they are the fruit.

Putting these all together, we find that the New Testament teaches that we are justified by:

grace-this means we don't deserve it.

faith-this means we must receive it.

blood-this means it was purchased by the Savior's death.

power-this means that the Resurrection proves God's satisfaction with the Savior's work.

works-this means that when we are genuinely justified by faith, there will be good works to prove it.

All these aspects of justification have been expressed poetically as follows:

God's sov'reign grace selected me
To have in heav'n a place;
'Twas the good pleasure of His will;
I'm justified by grace.
In due time Christ on Calv'ry died;
There flowed that crimson flood
Which makes the foulest white as snow;
I'm justified by blood.

God raised Him up; this is the pledge,
Should evil doubtings lower;
His resurrection quells each fear;
I'm justified by power.

The Holy Spirit guided me
To what the Scripture saith;
I grasped the truth; Christ died for me!
I'm justified by faith.

Now if you doubt that I am Christ's,
If one suspicion lurks,
I'll show by deed that I am His;
I'm justified by works.

I praise the Lord, 'tis all of Him,
The grace, the faith, the blood,
The resurrection pow'r, the works;
I'm justified by God!
-Helen H. Shaw

POSITION AND PRACTICE

There is no key more helpful in unlocking the New Testament than an understanding of the difference between the believer's position and his practice. If you do not see this distinction, there will be times when passages will be positively confusing and even seemingly contradictory.

Position and practice are sometimes spoken of as standing and state; the meaning is the same. In brief, a Christian's position is his standing in Christ-what he is in Christ. His practice is what he is in himself-or better, what he should be. The first has to do with doctrine, the second with duty.

There is a difference between what a believer is in Christ and what he is in himself. Grace has given the man in Christ an absolutely perfect standing before God. He is accepted in the Beloved One (Eph. 1:6) and complete in Christ (Col. 2:10). His sins have been forgiven and he is clothed in all the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). It is no presumption for him to say:

Near, so very near to God,
I could not nearer be;

For in the Person of God's Son
I am as near as He.
Dear, so very dear to God,
Dearer I could not be;
The love with which He loves His Son,
That is His love to me.

The believer's practice is something else again. Unfortunately, it is far from perfect. In most cases it varies from day to day. Sometimes the believer is on the mountaintop spiritually. At other times he may be in the valley of defeat.

Now God's will is that our practice should increasingly correspond to our position. Out of love for the One who died for us, our everyday lives should be constantly growing in Christlikeness. Of course, we will never reach a perfect state in this life; that will never happen until we die or until the Savior comes. But the process should be going on; we should be becoming in practice more and more like what we are in position.

When we see the Savior we will be automatically like Him (1 John 3:2). This transformation will take place by divine power, without our cooperation. But it brings more glory to God if His people are growing in the likeness of the Lord Jesus in this life.

How can you tell whether a particular passage is speaking about our position or our practice? Well, watch for such phrases as "in Christ," "in the Beloved," or "in Him"; when you find such phrases, you can usually be sure that the writer is speaking about our position (see Eph. 1:3-14). The best way to identify our practice is to notice when we find a verse that tells us what we ought to be or do.

The invariable order in the New Testament is to find position first, then practice. Several of the Epistles are structured on this order. In Ephesians, for instance, the first three chapters describe what we are in Christ; the last three describe what we should be in daily living. In the first three chapters we find ourselves in heavenly places in Christ; in the last three we are tackling the nitty-gritty problems of the home and the business world.

Now let us see how helpful it is to be aware of this distinction as we study the New Testament. Here are seven simple examples of the difference between position and practice.

Position
Practice

Example 1

For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:14). Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

The first verse says that all believers are perfect; the second says that all believers should be perfect. This would sound like double-talk if we did not realize that the first speaks of our standing and the second of our state.

Example 2

How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? (Rom. 6:2). Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (Rom. 6:11).

You are dead to sin-this is the position into which grace has put you. Now be dead to sin day by day-this is what your practice should be.

Example 3

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons (children) of God, even to them that believe on his name (John 1:12). Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children (Eph. 5:1).

As soon as a person is born again he becomes a child of God. From then on he should be a follower of God as a beloved child. All who are God's children are expected to bear the family likeness, that is, to be godly.

Example 4

God is faithful, by whom y