

April – June 2006

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre... But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping” (John 20:1, 11)

The Scriptures give only limited details about the character of Mary Magdalene, but suffice to show that she was the recipient of great restoration and forgiveness (cf Luke 8:2). Those who are forgiven much, love much; and on account of her deep affection for the Saviour, this first day of the week found her weeping and heart-broken at the graveside. Yet these emotive outpourings manifested not only love, but also an underlying state of **unbelief**. She was crying at the sight of an empty grave – the very thing which should have stimulated rejoicing, and hope.

The Holy Spirit teaches, through this inspired record, a vital lesson: **Love** must ever be accompanied by **Faith**. The patriarch Jacob, in a spirit of doubt and fear, said: *“all these things are against me”* (Genesis 42:36), but such was not the case. That which he thought to be an evil course of events, proved in the end to be to his good. Similarly Mary, standing beside the sepulchre was ‘walking by sight’. Devoted woman as she was, she had completely forgotten the Saviour’s words.

The angels sitting inside the empty tomb observed her distracted state, and asked: *“Woman, why weepest thou?”* (John 20:13). Their question was no idle enquiry, but doubtless intended to stir up her troubled mind by way of remembrance. ‘Why weepest thou?’ ‘Have you any real cause to weep now?’ ‘Come, think again Mary! Does not Christ’s absence afford grounds for joy?’ The gentle reproof of these angelic messengers went unheeded, as she replied,

“they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him” (John 20:13). She owned the Saviour as ‘**Lord**’, and yet had lost sight of the fact of His resurrection. Any measure of faith she had was inactive, swallowed up by emotion and devotion. Thus the reality of her profession of Christ as Lord, proved meaningless when put to the test.

It is a blessed thing to be able to say, in a spirit of devotion *“The Lord is my Shepherd”*, or *“My Beloved is mine and I am His”*; but quite another thing to live in the good of such truth, in a practical and experimental way. Devotion is a wonderful and commendable trait, but the Christian cannot walk, or live, by devotion: it must be balanced by **faith**, *“For we walk by faith”* (2 Corinthians 5:7). Acts of devotion, and expressions of love arising from a faithless heart, are of little worth.

Turning away from these celestial beings, Mary observed a third person standing in that garden cemetery, whom she also failed to identify, and who plies her with precisely the same question: *“Woman, why weepest thou?”* (John 20:15). ‘Why are you in this trouble?’ The answer is self-evident: Mary was not resting upon the Word of God. She had heard all that Christ had taught during His earthly ministry, and of course accepted it. She would never have queried aught that He said, but would be amongst the first to profess to its truth and veracity. Yet when it came to this point of trial, there was something lacking. Mary had no real **assurance** of that which she professed to believe.

Devoted soul that she was, Mary wanted something over and above that which God had **said**. The Lord had said that He would rise again (cf Luke 18:33), but this proved insufficient for Mary, who could not rest upon His words, in their simplicity. For all her devotion and love, still she lacked assurance. There are many who profess the Name of Christ today, in a similar condition; they are

seeking for something more than the simple, straightforward promises of God's Word. Many look within their own doubting hearts, hoping that God will impart some kind of inner feeling; a secret persuasion that a certain portion of Scripture is specifically for them. The fact is, **all** the Word of God is for **all** the people of God in **every** generation. It is the duty of each individual Christian to personally appropriate it, believe it, and live by it. The person who is searching for something more than the word of Christ as the ground of hope – be that an inward sensation, special revelation, or mystical sign – are by their very attitude disparaging the Word of God, doubting its authority and primacy, and doing great disservice to its Divine Author.

Thus came those poignant questions to Mary – from one she supposed to be the gardener, but who was actually the Risen Lord – “*why weepest thou? **Whom** seekest thou?*” This second query was equally significant, for the Lord had said that **He** was the Resurrection and the Life (cf John 11:25); that He would lay down His life and take it again (cf John 10:17); that He would be killed, and after three days, rise from the dead (cf Mark 8:31). Then why should Mary be found, after the specified time, in view of an empty grave, in a state of such distress? To weep for grief, at the sight of this great testament to resurrection, was evidence of rampant unbelief. For all her past devotion, these questions put to Mary by the Lord, formed a solemn double rebuke.

Then it was that Christ spoke to her again, not now addressing her as ‘Woman’, but calling her by name: “*Jesus saith unto her, Mary*” (John 20:16). Here is a precious scene, crowned by a gracious and personal appellation. It is reminiscent of Moses, of whom the Lord said: “*I know thee by **name**, and thou hast also found grace in My sight*” (Exodus 33:12). Even so with this dear woman; she was miserable and misguided, to the extent of failing to recognise the Lord who stood beside her. Yet one word sufficed to turn doubt to

faith, sorrow to joy, and restore the sight to tear-bemisted eyes: ‘Mary’ – it was her name. Maybe she was present to hear the Lord’s discourse recorded in John 10, where He said: “*He calleth His own sheep by **name***” (v. 3). Perhaps she knew that reassuring word spoken by the prophet: “*But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel. Fear not: for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by name: thou art mine*” (Isaiah 43:1). “*Mary.*” It was as though the Lord said ‘Do you not know me?’ ‘Do you not remember My words?’ ‘Can you not believe?’ That one word transformed the ‘weeper’ into a ‘worshipper’.

John 20:16 states “*She turned herself*”. This is an important statement. Looking first into the grave, her heart was filled with fear and unbelief, and bereft of joy; now turning herself, she is looking to Christ. She recognises Him, and finds Him true to His word: He **is** risen indeed! Previously she had spoken of Him as ‘my Lord’, but now she responds with one word – ‘Rabboni’ – or, **Master**. Herein lies the test of real discipleship. An individual may speak of Christ as ‘Saviour’, as ‘Redeemer’, or even as ‘Lord’ – but is He also ‘Master’? The true saint is in glad subjection to the authority of Christ, and His Word. They believe it, in its entirety, and rest unquestioningly upon it to the exclusion of all else, seeking no external evidences. They act in obedience to all its commands and precepts, knowing this to be the highest and best demonstration of love: “*If ye love Me, keep My commandments*” (John 14:15). Of those who are the sheep of His pasture, each one called by name, Christ says, they “*hear My voice, and...they **follow Me***” (John 10:27). Diligent obedience, and a following after the Master, are ever the hallmarks of genuine disciples.

This then, was the risen Lord’s first appearance, and the first day of His post-resurrection ministry, in which He spoke “*of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3). What were the

lessons taught, and the precepts given? Namely, that devotion and emotion are of themselves, insufficient. Those who by grace are members of this spiritual kingdom must be men and women of **true faith**; never sinking to the level of morbid doubting, whatever the circumstances, or however great the trial; but rather, resting implicitly upon all that God has said, and living accordingly.

W. H. Molland (*transcribed by R. Steward*)

“When you bewail the world’s iniquity, let not your emotions end in tears; mere weeping will do nothing without action. Get on your feet; ye that have voices and knowledge, go forth and preach the gospel, preach it in every street and lane...ye that have wealth, go forth and spend it for the poor, and sick, and needy, and dying, the uneducated, the unenlightened; ye that have time, go forth and occupy it in deeds of goodness; ye that have power in prayer, go forth and pray; ye that can handle the pen, go forth and write down iniquity – every man to his post, every one of you to your gun in this day of battle; now for God and for His truth; for God and for the right; let every one of us who knows the Lord seek to fight under His banner!”

C. H. Spurgeon

On 4th January 2006, our dear brother Mr Vincent Round passed away at Holsworthy Hospital, aged 93. Mr Round came to saving faith late in life, but was spared to serve the Lord for a further thirty years. From the time of his conversion and baptism, he was present at every gathering of the Church, and never failed to pray publicly at the weekly Prayer Meetings. He remained a devoted member throughout his recent period of illness and bodily restriction. Whilst the Church mourn this loss, it is touched with the joy of knowing our brother’s present heavenly condition, in ‘the Father’s house on high’. The funeral was held at the Chapel on 16th January.

To Ministers

When Nations are to perish in their sins,
'Tis in the Church the leprosy begins:
The Minister, who ought, with zeal sincere,
Watch the foundation and preserve it clear,
Carelessly nods, and sleeps upon the brink,
While others poison what 'the flock' must drink;
Or, waking at the call of lust alone,
Infuses lies and errors of his own:
His unsuspecting sheep believe it pure,
And, tainted by the very means of cure,
Catch from each other a contagious spot,
The foul forerunner of a general rot.
The Truth is hushed, that Heresy may preach,
And all is trash that Reason cannot reach;
Then God's own image on the soul impressed
Becomes a mockery and a standing jest;
And Faith, the root whence only can arise
The graces of a life that wins the skies,
Loses at once all value and esteem,
Pronounced by greybeards a pernicious dream;
Then Ceremony leads her bigots forth,
Prepared to fight for Shadows of no worth;
While Truth, on which Eternal Things depend,
Finds not, or hardly finds, a single friend:
As soldiers watch the signal of command,
They learn to bow, to kneel, to sit, to stand;
Happy to fill Religion's vacant place
With hollow form, and gesture, and grimace.

William Cowper

Foreknowledge and Election

Who elected whom? Did we elect God, or did God choose? If we chose Him, then **He** is the elect; but if He chose us, then **we** are the elect. *“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 1:2). Obviously, men are elected (chosen) by God, not God by men. On what basis? On the basis of God’s **foreknowledge**. What is foreknowledge? ‘Knowing before’. Knowing **what** before? No...knowing **whom** before. *“For whom He did foreknow, He did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son”* (Romans 8:29).

Some believe that **foreknowledge** means that God knew beforehand **who would chose Him**, and on that basis, God elects these to salvation. This teaching puts the emphasis on man’s **works** rather than on God’s **grace**. Besides, the Word of God tells us in Romans 3:11: *“There is none that seeketh after God.”* The choice (election) depends upon God, not sinful man. In his unregenerate state, not only is man **not willing** to please God; he is **not able**, because he is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (cf Ephesians 2:1). Regeneration is totally the work of God the Holy Spirit. *“Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit”* (John 3:7,8).

Man cannot give birth to himself either physically or spiritually. The Word of God is the incorruptible seed that brings forth the new birth. The process of this birth takes place through the imperceptible work of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of the elect. The Spirit uses as His instrument the Word of God. *“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. And this is the word which*

by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:23, 25). The one being born has no control over his spiritual birth – he is completely passive.

Foreknowledge means more than knowing beforehand what actions men will perform. Let us notice some Bible examples. *“And the Lord called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I”* (1 Samuel 3:4). *“Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord revealed unto him”* (1 Samuel 3:7). God called Samuel before Samuel ever knew the Lord. Samuel was not seeking God, but God had already chosen Samuel, and now He revealed Himself unto him.

“Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; And before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:4,5). Here we have an example of foreknowledge. *“Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee”*. God knew Jeremiah from eternity. The Scripture does not say that God knew what Jeremiah would do or how he would choose, but it states that God **knew Jeremiah as a person**. Later, Jeremiah wrote: *“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee”* (Jeremiah 31:3). There we have a picture of God’s foreknowledge. The object of His foreknowledge is the object of His everlasting love.

What true child of God can see within himself anything worthy of God’s love? The person who thinks God loves him because he is righteous or because he keeps all the commandments demonstrates his ignorance of the nature of his own heart. He is guilty of gross pride. No, God set His love upon certain unworthy, undeserving creatures, who became His elect before the foundation of the world.

Foreknowledge and election go together, The Apostle Paul wrote: *“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen”* (Galatians 1:15-16). God sanctified (set apart) Paul before he was born, as He did Jeremiah. Yet God did not reveal to Paul that he was one of the elect until many years later. In Acts 9:1-22, we find the account of Paul’s conversion, as he was travelling the road to Damascus. Paul (then called Saul) was on a mission to seek out and destroy Christ’s followers. His desire at that time was not to serve Christ; indeed his heart was filled with hatred toward Christ. He wanted to destroy Him and His followers.

Then, in a traumatic personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, who chose to reveal Himself to Saul at that exact time, Saul was supernaturally brought to repentance. God changed Saul’s will. Immediately Saul lost his desire to persecute Christians. His desire now was to please the One who had revealed Himself to him and had called him out of darkness and into the light, making him a new creature.

God called Samuel before Samuel knew Him. God knew Jeremiah before He formed him in his mother’s belly. God set apart Paul from his mother’s womb. Each had a mission to fulfil as planned by God. Each was created by the Sovereign God for this mission. God foreknew them; He set His love on them in eternity past, long before they were born. God is the Potter; man is the clay. The Lord Jesus Christ said: *“All things are delivered unto me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will (willeth to) reveal Him”* (Matthew 11:27).

Election is of God. If anyone knows God, it is because God elected that person to be saved. God set His love upon certain unworthy

individuals in eternity past, electing them to be saved, predestinating them to be conformed to the image of His holy, precious Son, Jesus Christ. At His appointed time, as with Paul, He reveals Himself to them. At that time, they are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They are **born again** – born of the Spirit, born from above.

Some might argue that such a view of God and sovereign election would encourage men to continue in sin, for the doctrine of justification by faith alone appears to free man from any responsibility toward God. Such thinking is shallow and does injustice to the Scriptures regarding obedience, which can only be performed by the regenerated person. To be sure, some who intellectually accept the doctrine of sovereign election have carried their conclusions to a fatalistic extreme and excused themselves to live a life licentiousness; but we must not refuse to accept a doctrine in God's Word simply because we do not like some people's applications of it.

Truly born again children of God have a spirit of holiness working righteousness within them, so that as new creatures they abhor sin and love godliness. God, who chose them to salvation, will work holiness within them so that they desire to do only those things that please God. In this way, they are conformed to the image of His blessed Son. "*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*" (Philippians 2:13). The word '*worketh*' in this verse means that God is **energizing**, or causing to happen (same word used in Ephesians 3:20, speaking of the power that **worketh** in us). People who fail to strive after holiness and conformity to the image of the Son of God and obedience to the Word of God are not Christians at all, but counterfeits. A child of God has had his will freed from bondage to sin. Before he was spiritually born, his will was bound to his sinful nature. He was incapable of choosing righteousness or even coming to God for

salvation. *“Ye will not (are unwilling to) come to Me, that ye might have life”* (John 5:40). *“No man can (is able, has the ability to) come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will (incontestable certainty) raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:44).

When God gives the sinner new life, He restores Him to that state of fellowship and grants him imputed holiness that Adam lost for all men when he sinned. The *“new creature in Christ Jesus”* now comes willingly to God and joyfully obeys God’s commandments as a loving child of God. The *“everlasting love”* in the election of the child is now reciprocated. Let us hold fast the precious truths of Foreknowledge and Election and give God the credit for our salvation rather than exalting ourselves and our wills beyond measure. God is sovereign in salvation. May we humbly bow and honour the Almighty Sovereign who *“doeth according to His will...and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?”* (Daniel 4:35).

The Apostle Paul laid human reasoning to rest concerning God’s sovereignty in election in Romans chapter nine. The arguments are found in verses 14 and 19.

Argument 1: God would be unrighteous!

Answer: *“He saith...I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy”* (v. 15,16).

Argument 2: If God’s will is so powerful, He is unjust to hold man responsible!

Answer: *“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, why hast Thou made me thus? Hath not the Potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto*

dishonour? What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He hath afore prepared unto glory?” (v. 20-23)

The Word of God is the final authority. God is sovereign. He is the elector, not the one elected. Man is the one elected, not the one who chooses. Man responds as God has predestined. Foreknowledge is based on God’s love, not on man’s will. The doctrine of ‘free will’ is a human one and has no basis in the Bible. Salvation is of the Lord. Praise Him!

Charles H. Shofstahl

The ground of election did not lie in those who were chosen, but in God Himself. It is not true, as is sometimes said, that God chose certain persons unto salvation, because He foreknew that they would believe in Christ. He did indeed foreknow that, as He foreknew all that was to occur in time, but that foreknowledge was not the reason for His choice. Saving faith is a gift of the electing God to His elect by which their election is realized (cf Ephesians 2:8). Instead of being the ground of election, it is one of its consequences. The Bible states explicitly that God chose “*according to the good pleasure of His will*” (Ephesians 1:5). That can only mean He chose sovereignly.

God loved His elect from everlasting. For that reason He elected them to eternal life. And if the question be asked why God from eternity loved unto salvation some men in distinction from others, it behoves us humbly to confess ignorance.

R. B. Kuiper
‘God Centred Evangelism’

Made to Differ

“For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7)

This verse lies at the centre of Paul’s argument contained in chapters three and four of 1 Corinthians. It is a rhetorical question, which the hearer is obliged to answer, by examination of his own heart and conscience.

The Corinthian church, to which this epistle first came, was in a dreadful state of error and decline. All manner of heinous sin, and rampant worldliness abounded there. By contrast, spiritual growth and development was in short supply. Paul said: *“I...could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal...are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”* (ch.3:1, 3). One particular manifestation of their carnality was a sinful pride, and boasting in their supposed spiritual attainments. Far from ascribing glory to the Lord, they were attributing their Christian faith to the ministers who had taught them, thus creating rivalries, strife and division. *“One saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos”* (v.4). Some accounted their blessings to the preaching of Paul; others claimed Apollos as the source of their salvation. All were ‘wise in their own conceits’, and yet so very ignorant of the truth.

It was this erroneous delusion that Paul sought to correct: *“The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men”* (ch.3:20-21). ‘I and my fellow labourers’, says Paul, ‘are but the stewards and administrators of the things of God, and do not desire your honour or praise’. *“Learn in us not to think of men above that which is written...For who maketh thee to differ from another?”* (ch.4:6-7). This is the context of the

question, and it came to the Corinthians as a very serious rebuke. They were to cease from their partisan attitudes and spiritual pride, and answer several important questions concerning themselves, and their condition: Who is it that has made you different from the world in the first place? What spiritual attainments can you claim to have, that you have generated yourselves? What do you have, that has not been graciously **given** by Another?

The most benighted of the Corinthian believers must have been able to see the thrust of this argument, and answer for themselves. What was the power that had distinguished them, and separated them from the masses of humanity? Was it Paul, or Apollos? No – it was **Almighty God**, and His sovereign grace. What spiritual good did they possess, which was self-generated, or man-made? **None** whatsoever. All things were given by God. For, as John’s Gospel makes clear: “*a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven*” (John 3:27).

Here then is the fundamental truth of this verse. It is God alone who does the work of differentiation – making a distinction between one man and another; between saint and sinner. It is His eternal and sovereign prerogative. All the vast benefits and blessings into which the elect child of God enters, are God-given. They have nothing, but that which is received from the Divine hand of the Father of Lights (cf James 1:17). This is a vital doctrine, which needs repeating and reinforcing in these days. For many modern, nominal Christians, in response to the question “*who maketh thee to differ*”, are giving incorrect and wrong answers.

Some, like the Corinthians of old, give allegiance to men: preachers, pastors and theologians. Every denomination within Christendom has its big names, past and present, whom their dedicated followers flock to hear, or else speak of in awed and reverential tones. Some obtain a near-celebrity status, and have a

disproportionate, often detrimental influence over large swathes of the church. Yet the very greatest of men is still nothing more than a man – unable to save a single soul, by his own strength. Just as the instrument has no ability or force of its own, but lies inanimate until the skilled craftsman takes it up and wields it, so the best of preachers is impotent and incapable, until God deigns to use him, to achieve His sovereign ends. “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as **the Lord gave to every man***” (ch. 3:5). Human instrumentality may play a part in the Christian’s coming to faith, but it is God who regenerates, and gives the power to believe.

Others suppose they differ by virtue of their parentage. There are those who teach that a man may be saved on account of his parents’ faith. They confirm this error with various unbiblical ceremonies, and succeed in imparting a false sense of spiritual security, which may endure for a lifetime. Still others place great store by their nationality and country of birth, thinking this will distinguish them favourably in the sight of God. It is a vain hope. Are spiritual advantages to be obtained by these earthly means? “*No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin*” (Romans 3:9). Whatever differences one’s natural pedigree may produce upon earth, they will never suffice to promote a man to the citizenship of Heaven.

Perhaps the most common response made to the question ‘who maketh thee to differ?’ is ‘I, myself’. Many are inclined to believe, in matters of faith, that their own actions or endeavours have elevated them above other men, and procured their salvation from God. Some think that by works of righteousness, and abstinence from the worst excess of sin, they will merit a distinction. Some imagine that God foresaw a ‘preview’ of their lives, and observed in them graces and virtues worthy of salvation. Others talk at length about ‘making a decision for Christ’ and ‘accepting the offer of the

Gospel’, as though by their own words, and at their own volition, they saved themselves. All these diverse opinions reveal an underlying exaltation of ‘self’ in opposition to the sovereignty of God. All are contrary to the clear word of Scripture: “*There is none righteous...There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God...there is none that doeth good, no, not one*” (Romans 3:10-12).

Neither preachers, nor parents, nor personal worthiness cause the saint to differ in the Divine estimation. The distinction is entirely bestowed by God. Every true Christian’s testimony should be: “*by the grace of God I am what I am*” (1 Corinthians 15:10). This is the only correct answer that can be given to the question posed by the text. “*Who hath made thee to differ?*” God – in His sovereign, unconditional, electing grace. “*What hast thou, that thou didst not receive?*” Nothing. All that the saints have, all that they are, all that they will become, is given by God. “*For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8).

To come to a realisation of this essential doctrine, is a tremendously humbling experience; because it is the natural disposition of the flesh to “*glory as if thou hadst not received it*”. Man’s carnal instinct is to claim at least some credit for his salvation, and to persist with the notion that God’s gift was not entirely free, nor simply ‘received’, but earned or merited in some way. Yet Scripture makes plain that the process of regeneration and faith is “*Not of works, lest any man should boast*” (Ephesians 2:9). Herein lies the cure to arrogance and self-reliance: the converting and saving of elect souls is all of God, and all of grace. It is “*grace wherein we stand*” (Romans 5:2). This is the one and only distinguishing factor; this is what divides the redeemed saint, secure on the heaven-bound path, from the reprobate sinner, on the broad

way to eternal destruction. At the head of these two divergent roads is the electing grace of God: nothing more, nothing less.

Submission to, and acceptance of this fundamental principle brings with it many heart-warming companion truths. Since “*Salvation is of the Lord*” (Jonah 2:9), it is attended with Divine, preserving power. The man who imagines he has procured salvation by his own labours, must live in the continual fear that those works may prove unavailing. He worries, lest that which he has gained by self-exertion, might be lost through his transgression. Not so the trusting Christian, who rests in the confidence “*that He which hath begun a good work*” in them “*will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1:6). They are truly blest who know that what God’s grace has given, His grace will preserve to the end.

And the salvation that is sovereignly dispensed from Heaven, will inevitably be as wondrous, expansive, and Divine, as the God who gives it. By contrast, the best aspirations of those who are “*going about to establish their own righteousness*” (Romans 10:3) and save their own souls, are limited by their mortality and sinfulness. Their highest hopes and ideals fall far, far short of the salvation that God bestows upon His chosen people. For “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him...Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether...the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s*” (1 Corinthians 2:9; 3:21-23).

R. J. Steward

We have no reason to be proud of our attainments, enjoyments, or performances; all that we have, or are, or do, that is good, is owing to the free and rich grace of God. There is nothing we have that we can properly call our own: all is received from God.

Matthew Henry

Editorial

Modern, Western society seems to be set upon the objective of making everyone the **same**. ‘Difference’ and ‘Distinction’ are contrary to today’s way of thinking; it is now called ‘Discrimination’, and is fast becoming illegal. It is considered improper to distinguish between people of different ages, races, religions or physical abilities; between male and female, rich and poor, qualified or unqualified. Everyone, regardless of whom or what they are, must be treated equally. This attitude also has more subtle expressions. One of these is ‘fashion’ – in which everyone wants to wear the same styles, visit the popular places and mix with the ‘in-crowd’. What lies behind this modern psychology of ‘**equality**’ and ‘**sameness**’? It is a basic fear of being distinctive, different, or separate. No one wants to be the ‘odd-man-out’, or to be in the minority.

Needless to say, this prevalent worldly mindset is making inroads to the Church, and can already be seen in many places. There are the multi-faith ecumenical councils; there are modern evangelicals striving to become more like the world; there is the current unholy agglomeration of all who call themselves ‘Protestant’ or ‘Reformed’. No one wants to be different; no one dares to stand alone.

The words of 1 Corinthians 4:7 (considered in the preceding article) have ‘difference’ as their central theme. The Holy Spirit by Paul, uses the expression “*to differ*” as a euphemism for **salvation**, describing the saved soul as one who ‘differs from others’. Various titles are used in Scripture for the people of God, including such epithets as ‘believers’, and ‘disciples’. Here in this epistle another is given: ‘Different’, or ‘Distinguished’ (cf marginal reference). This is what the Christian is to be. In a world which craves uniformity, and conformity to its accepted modes and standards, the

saints are called to be **different**. “*Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*” (Romans 12:2). It is the express will of God for His people, that they be distinct from the unsaved around them. When they refuse to conform to the world, they are doing that which He requires of them. His will is being done on earth.

The Biblical account of the Passover, and the Hebrews’ great exodus from captivity, is one of the clearest Old Testament types of spiritual redemption. The Lord described the huge contrast which would be evident between the lands of Egypt and Goshen during that last and terrible night, and the reason for it: “*that ye may know that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel*” (Exodus 11:7). Even here, in this early allusion to the work of salvation, God declares His purpose and object in it; namely, that His people should be made manifestly and visibly different from others. Their obedience to His Word, their deliverance from bondage, was all to emphasise the God-ordained difference between the trophies of His grace – and the rest.

God’s design and desire for His children, is that they be distinguished, and distinguishable from the world. Although this present evil world constitutes enemy territory, and a spiritual battleground, they are not permitted to wear camouflage, nor to go into hiding, and wage a stealth campaign. They are to be as distinctive as a “*city that is set on a hill*” (Matthew 5:14); as a light upon a prominent and elevated stand (cf Luke 8:16). Whilst this may be a daunting prospect, it is also the clear command of God, and must be obeyed.

In this principle of ‘distinction’ lie the answers to many vexed practical questions that face Christians and Churches in the present day. For example: why is it necessary to dress smartly, and for

women to observe the headcovering in worship? To make a **difference**, and give outward evidence to one's faith, such that the casual observer on the street knows immediately that a Place of Worship, and not the leisure centre, is the destination. What music is appropriate for the accompaniment of hymn-singing? Music that is sufficiently **different** from the cacophony of modern pop-songs, so the passer-by within earshot knows beyond doubt that hymns are being sung. What language is suitable for use in prayer and Scripture reading? Language which is **different** from the normal mode of conversation, so that the stranger hearing it for the first time is instantly aware that the Thrice Holy, Eternal God is being addressed.

This formula could be profitably extended to many other points of contention. Let every Christian examine themselves, wherever they are found, whatever company they keep, whichever course of action they are minded to take, and ask: 'Does this thing compromise in any way my distinctiveness as a Believer?' "Would it still be evident to a bystander that I am **different** from the world?"

The tragedy today is that the masses of evangelical Christendom are behaving in precisely the opposite way; they are afraid to be different, and scared to stand out. The Devil has deluded them into believing that if they want to **attract** the unconverted, they must **act** like the unconverted. Heeding his insidious whisperings, they dispense with reliable Bibles and hymnbooks, cast aside all forms of Church order and discipline, and exorcise from their gatherings any remaining vestiges of holiness, piety and reverence. They, having once known God, are turning back to the weak and beggarly elements (cf Galatians 4:9). Having received the grace of God in salvation, they begin to act as though they had not received it (cf 1 Corinthians 4:7), conducting themselves like the unconverted; like those who are ignorant of God's commandments. Worse still, they go so far as to 'glory' in this unbiblical condition, describing their

erroneous behaviour as an evangelistic technique for building bridges with the unsaved.

The sin that blights the modern Church, also characterised Corinth, and several centuries before, plagued the Jewish nation. To them came the Word of God by Ezekiel in no uncertain terms: “*Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned my holy things: they have **put no difference** between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean... Therefore have I poured out my indignation upon them... their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD*” (Ezekiel 22:26, 31). The priests failed to make any distinction between the holy and the commonplace. They treated the temple like any other building, the Sabbath like any other day, and thereby **profaned** them; showing contempt and irreverence for that which is Divinely appointed.

The threatened retribution is terrible to contemplate. God is saying to those who make no distinction between the secular and the sacred, ‘Beware lest I follow in your way, and revoke the distinction placed upon you, and cease to distinguish between you Jews, and the condemned nations round about!’ Let the liberal, indistinct, nominal Christian take heed, lest God recompense their way upon their head; and having lived like the world here below, they find themselves condemned with the world hereafter.

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 3rd & Lord’s Day 4th June 2006 D.V.

Preacher: Mr Tom Hill
(Borehamwood)

a cordial invitation is extended to all