

Ten Marks of Distinguishing Grace

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The Word of God everywhere speaks of grace as distinguishing, discriminating and particular. Grace is never general, common or indefinite. Here are ten clear examples of distinguishing grace.

The Everlasting Covenant

Scripture talks freely and frequently of God's promises to particular men. God made personal covenants with Noah, Moses, Abraham and David all of which teach us about the meaning of God's covenant promises in general, and the nature of the everlasting covenant in particular (Genesis 17:7; Hebrews 13:20).

The 'everlasting covenant' has several names in scripture including the 'covenant of grace' and the 'covenant of peace'. It is first made known in the Garden of Eden when God reveals His plan to send a Deliverer who will bruise the serpent's head – though not without hurt to Himself (Genesis 3:15).

The parties to the everlasting covenant are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three distinct persons of the Godhead have covenanted together to accomplish all the requirements of justice and grace to secure the salvation of the elect of God. God has chosen a people in eternity as a bride for His blessed Son (John 17:24), Christ has subjected Himself to the cross to deliver the elect from judgement and death (John 17:4, 5; Hebrews 10:9). Then the Holy Spirit brings the blessings of Christ's atoning work to those for whom the Son died, calling them, sanctifying them and applying to them the gifts of the everlasting covenant (1 Peter 1:2).

Personal Election

In all its aspects the everlasting covenant is personal, particular and effectual. Those who benefit from this divine covenant are the elect of God. Election is the choice by God of certain individuals to receive the blessings of grace. The elect are taken particular note of by God in their individual persons. Their names are known by Him and eternally recorded in the Lamb's book of life (Luke 10:20; Hebrews 12:23).

Personal election is closely connected with predestination reflecting the certain attainment of the end to which God appoints His elect people. Heavenly glory is certain and assured for the elect because God's act of

choosing is God's will to save. The election of particular individuals by God before the world was created is His free gift to those whom He loved. Hence it is the first, or foundational blessing upon which all other blessings are built (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:3,4; Romans 8:30).

Special Love

God's love for His elect is an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3) and the motivating source of all His blessings to His people. The Bible word 'foreknowledge' illuminates the meaning of God's eternal love for His people. It carries the sense of God's everlasting intimacy with, and affection for, certain individuals. From this intimate love God's elective choice and predestinating purpose flow (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2).

The special love of God for His elect was the prompting reason for Christ coming into the world to redeem and save His bride (1 Timothy 1:15; Romans 5:8). It is a special, discriminating and particular love. God loved Jacob but hated Esau (Romans 9:11-13). The love of God is manifested in the salvation of those He places His love upon. They are His special people loved with a special, everlasting love (1 John 4:9; Romans 8:39).

Particular redemption

The objects of election and redemption are the same. Those whom God chose to save through special love are redeemed from sin by the blood and willing sacrifice of their Great Substitute. They are redeemed from among men (Revelation 14:4) and out of every people (Revelation 5:9). Scripture delights in identifying the redeemed of God as a particular group from amongst the inhabitants of the world. They are variously called God's sheep, God's people, the children of God, the church of God, the purchase of blood, and the travail of Christ's soul.

When the Lord died on the cross His death, sacrifice and atonement were designed to accomplish the deliverance and salvation of that particular, limited group of people whom God loved from before the foundation of the world. By laying down His life our blessed Lord and Saviour took our sins in His own body (1 Peter 2:24) and bestowed His own righteousness to those who could never by their own efforts be acceptable with God.

Particular redemption is a clear Bible doctrine and a foundational truth in the Christian faith. Yet today there are some who claim the heritage of the Reformation but balk at what they see as the restrictive implications of particular redemption. Arminians claim that on the cross redemption was purchased for all men in general, which either leads to Universalism where all men are saved, or renders the redemptive act incomplete until an act of belief or acceptance on the part of man makes it effectual.

Fullerites too, struggle with particular redemption. They claim Christ's redemption was 'sufficient' for all and 'efficient' for some when God

makes it so by applying it to certain sinners. For the Fullerite there is nothing in the atonement itself that is inherently particular. It has sufficient power for everyone should everyone believe and only becomes effectual when particularly applied.

Definite Atonement

It is helpful to emphasise 'definite atonement' in the light of this current confusion about the death of Christ. Fullerites, who build their evangelism on general offers of salvation and universal duties to believe, contend that all the blessings of the atonement are equally available and must be offered to every man. But, we reply, the atonement of Christ cannot be both indefinite and particular. If salvation is offered to all and all are duty bound to believe in Christ for salvation then the Saviour's work of atonement cannot be said to have been for the elect alone in distinction to others.

According to such preachers it is the believing of the sinner that makes it true whether or not Christ died for them. This nonsense mocks both scripture and reason by making the effect produce the cause. The power is not in the blood but in the faith of the individual which, when exercised, makes the blood avail. It would be less absurd if these free-offer preachers dropped their double-speak and affirmed with Arminian free-willers that Jesus died for all men, whether or not they believe in Him.

Sovereign Mercy

What a lovely word is mercy. Mercy is God's pity towards sinners who cannot help themselves. It presupposes guilt and is shown in undeserved pardon for those justly condemned by law. Mercy is displayed only in and through Jesus Christ. God is a consuming fire and outside of Christ no one can know the mercy of God.

Only those who are elected by God and redeemed by Jesus Christ can know the special, sovereign mercy of God. They are vessels of mercy (Romans 9:15, 23), filled with all spiritual blessings in Christ. They are begotten of God, bestowed with lively hope as heirs of the resurrection (1 Peter 1:2,3).

Distinguishing Grace

It is evident even from a cursory reading of the Bible that God deals differently with men. God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's. He chose Abraham, Moses and David. He loved Jacob and hated Esau. He distinguished between the Egyptians and the Hebrews, the Philistines and the Hebrews, the Canaanites and the Hebrews. John Gill writes:

The grand distinction God has made among men, lies in his special, distinguishing, and everlasting love to some, and not others; in his choice of them in Christ unto everlasting salvation; in the gift of them to Christ in

the eternal covenant; in the redemption of them by his blood; in his powerful and prevalent intercession for them; in God's effectual calling of them by his grace; in his resurrection of them from the dead to everlasting life, placing them at Christ's right hand, and their entrance into everlasting glory; when the distinction will be kept up, as in the above instances, throughout the endless ages of eternity; all which is owing, not to anything of man's, but to the free grace, sovereign will, and good pleasure of God.

Effectual Call

The effectual call of the gospel is a glorious example of God's distinguishing work. In gospel preaching the general call of the gospel goes out freely, widely, and indiscriminately to all who will listen. Gospel preaching is God's ordained means of grace. Yet, the fact is that none can savingly hear until and unless they are given spiritual life by God and experience the new birth. Sin and the fall render all men unwilling and unable to respond to the gospel call.

The effectual call is a distinguishing, personal command to live given to elect, redeemed sinners by God the Holy Spirit. It comes with power to effect and accomplish what is otherwise impossible. Consequently, only those to whom the gospel comes with life giving power are saved. Only those made willing in the day of God's power (Psalm 110:3).

Regeneration is the beginning of spiritual life in the sinner. It is those who are 'made alive' or quickened who are genuinely converted and believe unto salvation. God the Holy Spirit distinguishes between men in the effectual call, bringing new life only to those whom God has chosen and Christ has redeemed.

Divine providence

Perhaps we do not think of providence as a work of distinguishing grace yet it is God's particular care for His people. In providence God provides for their every need, feeding them materially and spiritually, arranging their circumstances, attending their every step with goodness and mercy (Psalm 23:6). God has even foreordained our good works that we may walk in them to the glory of His praise.

Do you feel the weakness of your flesh and the trial of your faith? God uses these to teach you patience. Do you feel a lack of wisdom? Then ask God to supply your every need (James 1:3-5). Do you know the chastening hand of God? It is a mark of God's love and distinguishing grace, for God does not chasten bastards, but sons (Hebrews 12:6,7).

Perseverance of the saints

Christ's prayer for His disciples and all His people in John 17 is a glorious example of God's commitment to preserve His elect and bring to perfection

that good work of salvation which He has begun (Psalm 94:14). God has given His people eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of His hand. This is the distinguishing grace of God, His eternal commitment, His certain promise.

One day soon the Lord Jesus is going to come for all His people and take them to Himself. He will come for all those bound together in Him within the everlasting covenant. All the loved of the Father. All for whom He died. Every redeemed sinner whom the Holy Spirit has called to new life in Christ.

Our Lord will enter heaven to great praise and acclaim. The angels will worship Him, the Church will praise His name. He will turn to His Father and declare, 'Lo, I and the children Thou hast given Me!' Then our joy will be complete.

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