

DISTINCTIVES OF GRACE
Bible Study Notes #13, December 4, 2005

SUMMATION: THE CONSEQUENCES OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

We have finished our study of the five great “sola” statements of the Reformation and the five points of the doctrines of grace or Calvinism. We have seen the Scriptural basis and support for each of these, the development of them from Christian history (the Reformation and the Synod of Dort in particular), the impact for us and all men in our lives, the impact on our view of God and the praise and glory He alone deserves. These are truly great studies in the great and sovereign God we worship and serve, His nature and His plan of salvation, the nature of man and its impact on his salvation, and many other areas.

All ideas have consequences! Certainly, the most important ideas (namely theological theses or doctrines) have very grave and important consequences!

- ***What are the distinctive consequences of these distinct ideas?***
- ***What makes “reformed Biblical protestant evangelical Christian theology and practice distinctive from all other forms of Christianity, or even from all other forms of protestant Christianity?”***

Consider **the origin of sin and its consequences:**

Genesis 3:1-13 (NASB) Now **the serpent** (*Satan*) was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "**Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?**" (*Satan challenges God's authority and sovereignty!*) [2] And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; [3] but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it **or touch it**, lest you die.'" (*She adds some to God's word for effect!*) [4] And the serpent said to the woman, "**You surely shall not die!** [5] **"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** (*Satan doubts, distorts, and denies God's word!*) [6] **When the woman saw** (*perception in deception, or the lust of the flesh in 1John 2:16*) that the tree was good for food, and that it was **a delight to the eyes** (*the lust of the eyes*), and that the tree was **desirable to make one wise** (*the boastful pride of life*), **she took from its fruit and ate** (*personal choice to sin and reject the authority and sovereignty of God*); **and she gave also to her husband with her** (*led her mate into sin also*), **and he ate.** (*Adam was responsible for her sin and his!*) [7] Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that **they were naked** (*exposed in more ways than one!*); and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (*A futile attempt to hide or cover their sin and shame!*)

[8] And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and **the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord** (*They did not want to see God or be reminded of His sovereignty over them!*) God among the trees of the garden. [9] Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" [10] And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." [11] And He said, "Who told you that you were

naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" [12] And the man said, "**The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.**" (*Adam blamed the woman!*) [13] Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "**The serpent deceived me, and I ate.**" (*The woman blamed the snake – the devil!*)

- **What can we see already in this first sin about the natural state of man after the fall, and the sovereignty of God?**

We are in the fallen state of radical or total or complete depravity. What is the natural thinking of our fallen minds about our importance or choices over God's?

J. I. Packer said that "Arminianism is "natural" in one sense, in that it represents a characteristic perversion of Biblical teaching by the fallen mind of man."

- **What does that mean? How does Arminianism represent our natural fallen thinking?**

After six months of debate or court in 1618 and 1619, the Synod of Dort condemned the teachings and views of the Remonstrance as *unbiblical* and as really part of the *Pelagian heresy!*

- **Was this "fair" or accurate to brand Arminian teaching as "heretical?" Why or why not?**

It is interesting that the word **heresy** comes from a Greek root (*hairesis*) which literally means "choice", which in turn comes from a root meaning "to choose!" Its most basic meaning is a choice of beliefs by a faction that rejects and counters the established dogma or orthodox ("straight") position from the Scriptures.

Although error and heresy was not anything new to the true church, this controversy and error marked the beginning of liberalism in the modern church. The disease of unbelief grew into all areas of theology.

"Calvinism represented the consistent, logical, conservative orthodoxy; Arminianism an elastic, progressive, changing liberalism." Phillip Schaff

The disagreement in the Synod of Dort is summarized in the five points we have studied. The issues in the Reformation could be summarized in the five solas we have studied. Although the range of issues for both are wide and varied, and many disagreements went outside these main points, the theological were these we have studied.

Perhaps, these ten could be more narrowed to be **summarized in two main issues:**

1. **The correct (low) view of man – Totally depraved and sinful in nature**
2. **The correct (high) view of God – Totally sovereign and glorious in nature**

As we have seen, the five points of the doctrines of grace can all be developed and understood in light of the first point about the condition and nature of man, (dead and sinful). Likewise, the five solas of the Reformation can be developed and understood in the light of the principle of “for God’s glory alone!”

Let’s examine some of the **distinctive consequences** of these ideas and teachings that develop from **classic** (Biblical) **Reformed and Calvinistic theology**. In other words, how do (or how *should*) these distinctives separate those who hold to them from all other veins or streams of protestant Christianity? For example, consider the impacts and distinctives in certain key areas such as:

1. Scripture, (the doctrine of):

The ultimate reason that the Synod of Dort labeled the positions of the Remonstrance as being heretical was they understood their view of man’s “free will” opened up the theological “can of worms” about many issues. One of the most important was the doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures.

- **Consider, if their view of man’s free will is correct, how can God superintend man’s words so carefully and completely?**

If God allows absolute freedom and allows the writers of Scripture the absolute freedom to make absolute choices, then we can only expect **mistakes** in the Scriptures. The nature of human freedom means that mistakes would inevitably occur! The Arminian says that free will must operate on its own, and that Divine sovereignty must respect human free will.

- So how can we be sure that the writers of the Bible did not sometimes (if not most of the time) exert their own free will apart from the sovereignty of God, therefore putting mistakes in the Bible?

On the other hand, if we have a sovereign God Who exercises His good providence and control for the purpose of His glory and mercy on His creatures, then we can expect times when He does not allow freedom in order for a particular task to be accomplished. Specifically, He would superintend every background element, every unique characteristic, every word, every *jot and tittle* to produce the Word of God without error!

- **If the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible is questioned, all manner of other errors inevitably follow. What might some of those be?**

Some of the leaders of the Remonstrance ended up questioning (even denying) the Deity of Jesus Christ. It did not stop there either, as the disease of error crept into the church and the culture she is called to disciple. The deadly cancer of humanism naturally followed, as some logically reasoned that, if man is not completely fallen, then it logically followed that he is able of ascertaining truth; philosophical, scientific and theological through his unaided reason.

Thus, the so called “age of enlightenment” began! This culminated in the skepticism and naturalism of philosopher David Hume (18th century) and the scientific theories of Charles Darwin (19th century).

2. Salvation, (soteriology):

We have studied the vast and deep impacts on the plan of salvation and the doctrine of justification from these distinctive positions.

- **How would the modern American church change its presentation of the gospel and its evangelism efforts, if it believed these distinctives? How would the response to the gospel and its presentation change in such an environment?**

Consider the current focus upon entertainment, emotional appeal, and even cheap tricks to get someone to “decide” for Jesus. Also consider the many shallow and false decisions that are made for Him each day, and how the gospel is corrupted and cheapened.

3. Church government (ecclesiology):

We should note that the primary system of church government in early America was the Presbyterian form with elders and deacons in representative positions serving the members. The local churches were also autonomous and not subject to an ecclesiastical hierarchy nor a state church (as in England). This was true of most all Puritan congregations, all Presbyterian congregations, and even most Baptist congregations (at least until the 20th century).

- **How would the modern American church be different today if this was the majority belief and church structure?**

4. Mankind (anthropology):

A man-centered view of man has led to a warped view of man and anthropology. Man is no longer seen as a created being, but as the source of knowledge and principles. They are self-generated and intrinsically true because of personal freedom and choice. The concept of an external objective absolute truth that flows from our Creator rather than ourselves is lost. We no longer seek the truth outside of us which is divine and sovereign, but that which is within us and depraved.

- **How is the lack of this distinctive position seen in the view of mankind and the solutions to his problems?**

5. Personal choice and responsibility:

- **How do we see the impact of the exaltation of human choice over God’s sovereignty in the area of personal choice and responsibility?**

Man's free will choice not only rules in the areas of salvation and church issues, but leads to his sovereignty in all other areas like marriage, family, art, education, finances, law, sexuality, etc. Left unchecked, this free will has led to the insanity of our age – “true for you, but not for me”, the right of choice becoming exalted to enable one to choose death for their baby in abortion, the right of choice in sexual orientation (even against God's design and creation), the right to choose any lifestyle and force it upon the rest of society no matter the consequences (gay marriage, polygamy, pedophilia, bestiality, etc...), and any other corruption that the depraved human mind can dream up!

Likewise, the exaltation of free will and personal choice has made personal responsibility for those choices disappear. Since truth and standards are personal and relative, no one is responsible for their own actions or choices. Hence, murderers are victims of their environment or parenting, laziness is supported and encouraged by the state, and all men are taught that their own choices are sovereign and yet not responsible. Scripture teaches us that God is sovereign and we are responsible!

6. Politics and government:

Calvinism and reformed theology guided many of America's founders and kept them from entrusting power to the state. Instead they bound the state with the checks and balances of our three branches of government. Calvinism and Presbyterianism really influenced the “great experiment” that produced America. So, from that standpoint, this is the most influential strain of theology in all of history of man's government.

Isaiah 33:22 (NASB) For the Lord is our **judge**, The Lord is our **lawgiver**, The Lord is our **king**; He will save us—

One of the scriptural principles from which the founders got their system of division of power and its checks and balances.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NASB) "**The heart is more deceitful** than all else and is **desperately sick**; Who can understand it?

Since they understood the nature of man to be depraved and not trustworthy of the ultimate power and authority in government, they founded it upon a system of laws that were framed within the principles expressed in a controlling document, the constitution. Just as the Scripture alone was the sole authority for the Christian, the constitution (which was based upon the Scriptures) was the sole authority for the American.

Once men or government move away from the classic reformed or Calvinistic view of a sovereign God, they move toward a more humanistic statism, a reliance on other men and institutions, and toward a “Messianic state” that will save them and solve all problems in a utopia. This leans toward an individualistic, mass equalitarianism, democratic system. This may sound good to us as Americans, but it really leads to chaos with everyone struggling to rise above another, eventually leading to some form of tyranny (by a man, the army, the courts, etc.).

On the other hand, Calvinism leans toward a republican state with a division of powers, representative government, checks and balances, based upon the rule of law (from a constitution).

(Insert quotes from historian Page Smith in the Origins of the American Revolution)

- **How would America be different today if most of its leaders still believed as the founders did (in a reformed and Calvinistic Christianity)?**

7. Social and cultural standards

- **What current social and cultural standards are the results of this drift from the distinctives of a reformed view of the Scriptures? How do we view the church life versus the work life or the family life? What about church literature, media or entertainment versus that of the world? From where do the standards and morays come, versus where they should come?**

SUMMARY:

- **What is the “antidote” for all these problems and errors?**

We (as Bible believing Christians and churches) should believe, understand, teach, practice and demonstrate the distinctives of a Biblical worldview and lifestyle. We would proclaim the glorious truths of a sovereign God Who deals in grace and mercy with sinful men:

Daniel 4:25 (NASB) ... until you recognize that **the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes.**

Hebrews 12:29 (NASB) for **our God is a consuming fire.**

Romans 1:18 (NASB) For **the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Romans 3:25 (NASB) ... This **was to demonstrate His righteousness**, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

Ephes. 2:1 (NASB) And **you were dead in your trespasses and sins**,

Mark 10:27 (NASB) Looking upon them, Jesus said, "**With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.**"

SOLI DEO GLORIA!