

Title: Distinguishing Grace
Text: 1 Corinthians 4:7
Readings: *Micah 6:1-8*
Tape # Z-8b

Introduction:

Such is the depraved nature of man that we all naturally cherish, nurture, cling to, and promote in ourselves and in one another that which is most abhorrent to God and most certain to bring us at last to utter ruin. The evil I speak of is the original sin of the universe, the persistent sin of our race, the most abominable of all sins in the sight of God, and the sin with which I have to do battle every day, every waking hour. The sin I speak of is pride!

Pride was the sin of Lucifer in the beginning (Isa. 14:13-15). Pride was the problem Adam had in the garden. Pride arises like an ugly weed and monstrous destroyer in the heart. There is no such thing as a truly humble man by nature. Man's pretense of humility is just another expression of pride calling attention to itself. It is pride that hardens the heart and keeps sinners from coming to Christ (Dan. 5:20). — "*The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts*" (Ps. 10:4). Nothing but pride causes a person to reject the Word of God (Jer. 43:2). The root and cause of all carnal strife, division, whisperings, backbiting, and slander is pride, showing itself in envy and jealousy. Pride is the great deceiver of men. It makes men and women behave in cruel, mean-spirited self-righteousness under the guise of doing God's service. Be warned my friends! Be warned, O my soul! Be warned...

(Proverbs 16:18) "Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

(Micah 6:8) "He hath showed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

With those things in mind, I want you to turn with me to a text of Scripture that the Holy Spirit has been burning into my heart for several weeks — 1 Corinthians 4:7. My subject is Distinguishing Grace. You will see the reason I have chosen this title for my message as soon as we read the text.

(1 Corinthians 4:7) "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?*"

These three questions may be and should be applied any and all differences which appear among men.

- Natural Differences: *Physical — Mental — Moral!*
- Differences Among Preachers: *Gifts — Abilities — Usefulness — Place!*
- Differences Between Believers and Unbelievers!

Proposition: I want you to hear what I am saying. The object of my message today is to show you from the Word of God that whatever differences there are between believers and unbelievers, between God's elect and the reprobate, must be traced to the distinguishing grace of God alone.

Let's look at these questions together and pray that God the Holy Spirit will burn them into our hearts and cause us never to forget them.

*"Who maketh thee
to differ from another?"*

I am going to spend a little time here, leaving the other two questions for the summation of my message; but I want us to see three things here.

Sinners Still

There is a sense in which God's elect do not differ from other people, and we know it. Though we have been chosen by God the Father, redeemed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and called by the blessed Holy Spirit of promise, though we are saved by God's adorable and amazing grace, the people of God in this world are sinners still. This is a sad fact, but a fact nonetheless, and a fact we must never forget. Grace does not eradicate, or even change the believer's old, Adamic, sinful nature. Grace subdues it. Grace rules it. Thank God, one day grace will destroy it! But grace does not change our old nature.

We know something about the depravity of our hearts (Matt. 15:19).

(Matthew 15:19) "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

The most shocking thing I discovered as a young believer, shortly after God saved me, was the fact that the raging monster of sin in my heart had not been slain, or even tamed.

Illustrations: High School English Teacher
Boy At Springfield

And the sad fact is, I am every day made increasingly aware of the depths of my depravity. Yet, I know that I have not even begun to discover the hideous enormity of my sinfulness!

We know that our best deeds of righteousness are just filthy rags in God's sight (Isa. 64:6; 1 John 1:8, 10).

(Isaiah 64:6) "But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

(1 John 1:8) "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

(1 John 1:10) "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

I have sinned. I do sin. I am sinning. But the worst of it is this — I am sin! When I would do good, evil is present with me! So I cannot do the things that I would! All that I am, and all that I do, is sin! Let me see if I can state the matter clearly.

- There is nothing in all the world more delightful to me than prayer; but there is nothing more difficult.
- There is absolutely nothing in the world that I desire like I desire to believe God; but nothing is more troublesome to me than my unbelief.
- There is nothing in the world I more want to do than to worship Christ and walk with him in sweet communion; but nothing appears to be further out of my reach.
- There is nothing in this world which I strive harder to attain than conformity to Christ in thought, word, and deed; but the more I strive after it the more illusive it appears to be.
- The fact is, I am a man at war with himself (Rom. 7:14-24; Gal. 5:17).

(Romans 7:14-24) "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (15) For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. (16) If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. (17) Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. (19) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (20) Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (21) I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. (22) For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: (23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

(Galatians 5:17) "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

"If I pray, or hear, or read,
Sin is mixed with all I do.
You who love the Lord indeed,
Tell me, is it thus with you?"

Yet, I mourn my stubborn will,
Find y sin a grief and thrall!
Would I grieve for what I feel,
If I did not love the Lord at all?"

Without question, there is a very real sense in which believers are no different from other people, so long as we live in this world, in this body of flesh. We still have the nature of our father Adam. We are sinners still!

Saved Sinners

Yet, our text clearly and distinctly suggests that God's saints are indeed different from other people. We are sinners still; but we are saved sinners, men and women with a new nature, that which is born of God.

The question, "*Who maketh thee to differ,*" would be redundant if no difference. God's people do differ from other people. Believers are different from unbelievers. God's saints are a peculiar people.

Believers are men and women who have undergone a marvelous change (1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:17).

(1 Corinthians 6:9-11) "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, (10) Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

- We have been "*washed*" from our sins by the blood of Christ. Our old record is gone, expunged, cleared!
- We are "*sanctified*" by the Spirit of God, given a new nature in regeneration. Righteousness as been imputed to us in justification; and a righteous nature was imparted to us in regeneration.
- We are "*justified,*" made righteous by divine imputation. This is mentioned last because it is experienced and perceived last. We were justified when Christ redeemed

us; but we had no knowledge of our justification until the Holy Spirit called us and gave us faith in Christ.

(2 Corinthians 5:17) “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Grace changes a person’s life! You may change your way of life without grace; but you cannot experience the grace of God that brings salvation without also experiencing that change of life that causes us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present, evil world.

Illustration: *Whitefield and the Coal Miners*

- We have a new Master over our lives. — The Lord Jesus Christ.
- We have a new motive in life. — The Will of God and the Glory of God!
- We have a new manner of life. — We are no longer the servants of sin, but the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:18).

(Romans 6:18) “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”

Illustration: *The Former Slave and His Old Master’s House*

Every person in this world who is born again by the grace and power of God the Holy Spirit bears the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

(Galatians 5:22-23) “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, (23) Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

- Love, joy, and peace toward God.
- Longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness toward one another.
- Faith, meekness, and temperance within.

Believers are people who live by faith in Christ, who trust the Son of God. It is written, “*The just shall live by faith.*” We trust Christ our God and Savior in his...

- Redemptive Work.
- Goodness and Faithfulness.
- Providential Rule.
- Heavenly Intercession.

God’s people love each other (1 Cor. 13:1-8; 1 John 4:7-8).

(1 Corinthians 13:1-8) “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. (2) And though I

have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. (3) And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (4) Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, (5) Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; (6) Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; (7) Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. (8) Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.”

(1 John 4:7-8) “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. (8) He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”

Believers are people who have been and are continually taught of God to live soberly, righteously and godly in this world. I stress this because it needs stressing. Don't tell me that so long as a persons believes the gospel it does not matter how he lives, that his character and conduct are insignificant. God's people do differ from unregenerate worldlings! (Tit. 1:11-12; Eph. 4:17-24).

(Ephesians 4:17-24) “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, (18) Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: (19) Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. (20) But ye have not so learned Christ; (21) If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: (22) That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; (23) And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; (24) And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

(Titus 2:11-12) “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, (12) Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;”

Distinguishing Grace

Those are the facts; but the question is — “*Who maketh thee to differ?*” Paul answers the question himself in Philippians 2:13 — “*It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*” That which distinguishes God's elect from the reprobate of this world is the distinguishing grace of God. It is written, “*The LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.*” The distinction which grace makes is a fivefold distinction.

1. The Distinction of God's Sovereign Election

(John 15:16) "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

(2 Thessalonians 2:13-14) "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: (14) Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. The Distinction of Christ's Blood Redemption

(Revelation 5:9) "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;"

3. The Distinction of the Spirit's Effectual Call

(Ephesians 2:1-4) "And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins: (2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,"

(Psalms 65:4) "Blessed *is the man whom* thou choolest, and causest to approach *unto thee, that* he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, *even* of thy holy temple."

4. The Distinction of God's Gracious Preservation

(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*."

5. The Distinction of Resurrection Glory

(John 5:28-29) "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, (29) And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

"*Who maketh thee to differ from another?*" Only God! — "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*"

- Noah learned this.
- David had to learn this.
- Peter learned it.
- Paul learned this (2 Cor. 12:3-10).
- And, one way or another, we will learn it.

(2 Corinthians 12:3-10) “And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) (4) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (5) Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. (6) For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but *now* I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me *to be*, or *that* he heareth of me. (7) And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. (8) For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. (9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

*“What hast thou
that thou didst not receive?”*

Nothing! — Nothing in Nature! — Nothing in Grace! — Nothing in Time! — Nothing in Eternity!

*“Now, if thou didst receive it,
why dost thou glory,
as if thou hadst not received it?”*

John Gill wrote, “To glory in any mercy, favour, or blessing received from God, as if it was not received from him, but as owing to human power, care, and industry, betrays wretched vanity, stupid and more than brutish ignorance, horrid ingratitude, abominable pride and wickedness; and is contrary to the grace of God, which teaches men humility and thankfulness. To God alone should all the blessings of nature, providence, and grace be ascribed; he ought to have all the glory of them; and to him, and him only, praise is due for them.”

Pride, envy, and jealousy are totally contrary to the grace we profess to believe. We are nothing but sinners saved by grace! There is no room for pride in the house of grace.

- Pride of Place!
- Pride of Face!
- Pride of Race!
- Pride of Grace!

(Psalms 115:1) “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, *and* for thy truth’s sake.”

(1 Corinthians 1:26-31) “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: (27) But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; (28) And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: (29) That no flesh should glory in his presence. (30) But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (31) That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

(Jeremiah 9:23-24) “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: (24) But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD.”

Satan desires to have us that he may sift us as wheat. And our Savior often runs us through Satan’s sieve, to separate the precious from the vile, teaching us to trust him.

(Luke 22:32-34) “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. (33) And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. (34) And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.”

(John 13:36-38) “Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. (37) Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. (38) Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.”

(John 14:1) “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.”

(John 21:17) “He saith unto him the third time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”

(Mark 16:6-7) “And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. (7) But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.”

When I read these three, humbling questions, “*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?*” my heart is humbled within me before my God and Savior, and cries, “*By the grace of God, I am what I am: and,*” I rejoice to confidently add, “*his grace was not bestowed upon me in vain.*” That which he has begun in me, he will finish “*to the praise of the glory of his grace.*”

Amen.

^{2[1]} Date: Danville — (Sunday PM — 08/13/06)
 Buck Mt. Baptist Church, Roan Mountain, TN — (Thur. 08/09/06)
