

For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? 2 Corinthians 6:14-16

The difference between Christians and the world is always and only defined by Christ himself as we are in him and he is in us. We are *Christ-ones*. By becoming a Christian we have ‘suffered the loss of all things’ that we had in our Adamic nature, in order that we might be found in Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith Philippians 3:8-9

In baptism we have put on Christ, the new man.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
Galatians 3:27

God’s purpose and will for us is ‘to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers’ (Romans 8:29). Therefore, we are to ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires’ (Romans 13:14). We must, therefore, understand everyday that we are very different from the Adamic world around us.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2

This non-conforming, and transforming, comes about by the renewal of our minds, that is, by a change in our thinking as we understand what God’s ‘good and acceptable and perfect’ will for us is in Christ.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God.
2 Corinthians 5:17-18

As Luther said, we need to ‘believe that the promises have been spoken by God’, and ‘magnify that word’.

Viva la difference!!!

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August 2010

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Different from the world around us

The question presses upon us today: “Are Christians really any different to the non-believers in the world around them?” The sins and failures of God’s people may lead them and others to say “No! They are just the same as everybody else!” (Same old, same old) But just as the world was created by God’s spoken word, so God’s people are recreated and redefined by the word that He has spoken to us and about us. We need, therefore, to attend closely to that word that makes us so different. Concerning that word Martin Luther wrote,

If only we are able to believe that the promises have been spoken by God and see behind them the one who has spoken them, we shall magnify that Word. But because we hear it as it comes to us through the lips of a man, we are apt to pay as little attention to it as to the mooing of a cow.

In the first study we looked at the inner difference between God’s people and the world around them, that is, the ‘mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Colossians 1:27). Now let us look at the outer difference, that is, the difference that other people can see.

Part Two: The outer difference

There are a number of ways in which those who are in Christ are outwardly or noticeably different to others.

1. Treasure in heaven, not treasure on earth

Jesus’ understanding of our situation in this life was radically different to that of the unbelieving world which is constantly anxious about material things.

And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he

clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Luke 12:22-31

The assurance we have as God's people is that he will provide for us in all circumstances. This assurance delivers us from coveting and makes us content in all circumstances. This is the opposite of the world—to be 'free from coveting possessions and money' and to 'be content with what you have'.

Keep your lives free from coveting possessions and money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'I will never leave you; I will never forsake you.' Hebrews 13:5

Jesus indicated to his followers that his Father had freely given them an eternal kingdom. They were, therefore, to use earthly wealth to store up heavenly treasure.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Luke 12:32-34

Paul reveals the attitude that God's people are to have to 'the world'.

...those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. 1 Corinthians 7:30-31

The following story illustrates how visible this difference can be.

A truck driver encountered an elderly couple in a massive traffic jam in the south of the USA. The couple had lost everything in cyclone Katrina except their pick truck and its contents. But their gentle and giving spirit made a big impact on other drivers whom they helped with food and drink. Mike, the truck driver testifies,

These wonderful people lost practically everything they owned and still would not accept any money for their food and drinks. Joe said that "it was better to give than it is to receive."

They had sought refuge behind a block wall that he had built years ago, and they watched their belongings and their home disappear in the winds of Hurricane Katrina. Joe said that during all this he had one hand holding onto Anna and the other holding on to God. Their truck and they themselves came out of Katrina unscathed.

As I stated before, Anna was singing a song while making the sandwiches. The song is titled "I know who holds tomorrow," an old gospel song. She knew every word, and was quite a gifted singer of it. The chorus of this song says, "Many things, about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand. But I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand."

There is no doubt, in my mind, who was holding both their hands.

distance' between the holy God and sinful humanity. He has crossed the great distance of alienation, and climbed the high and angry barriers, that separated guilty humanity from its holy Creator. 'The word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:12), and

For our sake (God) made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

This is the greatest distance ever travelled. As Charles Wesley put it:

He left his Father's throne above'
(so free, so infinite his grace!)
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race

Having reconciled us to God by going the distance, Jesus has made us 'ambassadors for Christ' and has given us 'the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Corinthians 5:18,19). His commandment, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15), means that Christians are those who are to 'go the distance' crossing all the distances and differences that separate human beings. An Ambassador is one who has gone the distance to live in someone else's country, where speech and culture are different. Christians are therefore, by nature, a bunch of goers, always going—across the room, across the street, across the border, across the sea. (See my leaflet *Going and gathering* for a fuller account of this ministry).

Transformed, not conformed

Looking back at our two studies we have seen that, both inwardly and outwardly, Christians are very different from the world around them. They are:

- baptised into Christ, not immersed in the world
- in the spirit, not in the flesh
- justified by grace, not by law
- in the new man, Christ, not in the old man, Adam
- treasure in heaven, not treasure on earth
- serving in community, not served as an individual
- power in weakness, not positions of strength
- carrying the death of Jesus, revealing the life of Jesus.
- going the distance, not manning the barriers

We notice that these differences are all radical in the sense that they are not differences of degree, but opposites of essence.

- **always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.**
- **For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.**
- **So death is at work in us, but life in you.** 2 Corinthians 4:10-12

Paul's 'so that' equation shows that when we 'carry in our body the death of Jesus', i.e. share in the suffering and rejection of Christ, that is our key opportunity to reveal the life of Christ in us.

Just as Jesus was able to reveal his true character on the Cross by praying for his enemies, so he instructed us saying,

**Love your enemies,
do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you,
pray for those who abuse you.** Luke 6:27-28

Jesus pointed out that 'even sinners love those who love them' (Luke 6:32). So there is no apparent difference there. But it was 'while we were (God's) enemies (that) we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son' (Romans 5:10). And so 'the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge' (Ephesians 3:19), and which is radically different to this world's love, 'controls us' (2 Corinthians 5:14). Therefore 'we always carry in the body the death of Jesus (i.e. persecution from Christ's enemies) 'so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies' as we love his enemies.

This is exactly what Stephen did. While he was being stoned to death he prayed for those stoning him:

And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:60

By love for our enemies and those who persecute us we 'commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God' (2 Cor. 4:2).

5. Going the distance, not manning the barriers

In every aspect of human life we are conscious of the distances that separate people and of the way in which differing groups remain apart and defensive towards each other. Distances between men and women, children and adults, young and old, rich and poor, black and white, Protestant and Catholic, Christian and Moslem, Crows and Port Power (not to mention Collingwood), and so on.

The Adamic way of dealing with these distances and differences is to 'man the barriers'. That is, to remain apart and defensive, even aggressive, across the difference and the distance. By contrast Jesus has 'gone the

Not only was the difference in Joe and Anna outwardly noticeably, but that difference made a big impact on this bunch of truck drivers. Mike reveals how that difference affected him.

I will soon be 48 years old, and I have to say that I have never eaten a tuna sandwich with side orders of reality and humility.

2. Serving in community, not served as an individual

As we saw in Part 1, those who are in Christ have undertaken a radical change of character from Adam to Christ. Jesus pointed out that in Adam those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But because we are in Christ, Jesus said, "it shall not be so among you," for "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Therefore "whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-45).

Jesus illustrated this radical difference at the Last Supper.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him...When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. John 13:3-5,12-17

The world around us (which is in the fallen nature of the Adamic flesh) is all about *me*. I am here as an individual to be served by others who give me what I want. When I am converted to Christ, however, I am fundamentally changed from individualism to community, from being served to serving, from insatiable greed to grateful giving.

Jesus knew 'that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God'. Therefore, being a servant did not demean him or affect his status as the beloved son of the Father. In the Father's kingdom 'the first will be last, and the last first' (Matthew 19:30), and 'whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted' (Matthew 23:12). Indeed,

‘whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it’ (Mark 10:15).

Knowing this the believer is happy to ‘go and sit in the lowest place’ at the banquet (Luke 14:10), and to be ‘last of all and servant of all’ (Mark 9:35).

Furthermore, unlike this world where people like to pursue their independent individuality, those who are in Christ have a ‘body’ understanding of their humanity as members of the body of Christ.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ...If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

3. Power in weakness, not positions of strength

There is a power inversion in the kingdom of God when compared to the kingdom of this world. Preaching on Revelation 5 Tom Torrance says,

People in our modern world imagine that God’s power is like the bare power we use in science, only absolutely almighty, and we think of the action of God’s power in terms of mechanical action and of the sheer crushing weight of atomic energy.

Now all that is a terrible mistake, indeed a frivolous mistake...No amount of bare power can forgive sin, or cancel guilt, or unmake the past, nor can we imagine it loving us and dealing with us in our shame and forbearing with us in our stubbornness.

Thank God His power is revealed to us in the vision (of Revelation 5) as absolutely different. God’s almighty power, God as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, is revealed as the Lamb as it had been slain. He is God who has stooped to enter into our weakness and into our guilty past, in order to break its power from within. This is the undreamed-of-thing, something that was not. A little babe was born, despised and rejected of men. On the Cross He became the weakness of God, a sacrificial Lamb, but as such the mightiest power in heaven and earth. That is the power that may enter our life and break it of its fetters and sin. It may deliver us from the clutches of sin-infested time and bestow upon us the pure freedom of the children of God.

The world still laughs at this power and calls it weakness, but this is the God who chooses the foolishness of the world to confound the mighty.

Thomas Torrance on Revelation 5, *The Apocalypse now*.

Paul says that this ‘word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:18). Those who are in Christ, therefore, live in this inversion of power in which ‘the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men’ (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

The apostles deliberately avoided using the power of this world so that their life and message would show the true power of God. Paul says,

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 1 Corinthians 2:3-5

Paul knew from personal experience that God’s power ‘is made perfect in weakness’. While all the world is grasping for power—personality power, muscular power, financial power, political power, religious power—the Christian is radically different and resolves,

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Christians are generally regarded as preferring to witness from a position of strength. We are inclined to create situations in which we are in control and the unbeliever is on foreign ground. Evangelistic crusades, rallies, special church services, camps, and home meetings are popular places for Christian witness. Unbelievers are invited into these settings but they are very wary of them, sensing the power arrangement.

But Jesus sent us out to bear witness to him in powerlessness.

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. Matthew 10:16-19

The radical difference in the Christian is that powerlessness is his/her true power.

4. Carrying the death of Jesus, revealing the life of Jesus.

Jesus spoke of his impending rejection, suffering and death. He also said that if anyone wanted to be his disciple they needed to take up their cross and follow him. We need to be clear about the way in which those who are in Christ today have been radically set apart from the world around them. Jesus was, and still is, rejected, persecuted and crucified by the people of this world system. In the same way those who bear Christ’s name will ‘share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings (2 Corinthians 1:5).

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul makes a statement about the Christian life which he repeats three times in different words. The statement, each case, speaks of something we do ‘so that’ something else will result.

He says that we are