

Merely **Assenting** to Election Proves Nothing in Itself

*The Doctrines of Grace are oft held in the head
By those who are in sins still dead!*

Shaun Willcock

The doctrines of sovereign grace are glorious and thoroughly scriptural doctrines. Indeed, the Gospel of the grace of God is the only true Gospel; and this Gospel tells us that man is totally depraved, utterly powerless to save himself (Rom.3:9-20); but God, from all eternity, of His free grace and mercy, elected some from every nation, and kindred, and tribe, and tongue, unto salvation in Jesus Christ (Rom.9:10-24; Eph.1:3-6). Then in the fulness of time, Christ died for the elect, and for them alone (Eph.5:25; Jn.10:11,26,28); and in God's appointed time, each one of the elect is irresistibly drawn to Christ for salvation (Jn.6:37,44); and those thus drawn to Christ, never perish, but having been predestinated, called, and justified, they are glorified in due time (Rom.8:29,30). To be sound in doctrine, one must be well-acquainted with these scriptural doctrines.

However, merely holding to sound doctrine in the head is not enough! Having a sound theology is *not* an automatic guarantee of the work of regeneration!

For centuries these scriptural truths were firmly held and faithfully proclaimed throughout the Christian Church. But then that false doctrinal system known as "Arminianism," with its emphasis on man's supposed "free will" and its denial of the sovereignty of God in salvation, came to hold sway almost universally over professing Christendom. By the mid-twentieth century the situation was bleak: it seemed as if the entire professing Church was Arminian.

Over the past few decades, however, there has been a revival of interest in the great doctrines of sovereign grace. Churches have arisen which hold to these biblical truths and utterly reject Arminianism; ministers all over the world stand up in pulpits every week and expound these doctrines to their congregations; and publishing houses are hard at work republishing the great old doctrinal classics of past ages, as well as new works emphasising these doctrines.

And yet... something is wrong.

Yes, there is a revival of the doctrines of grace – but not, alas! a corresponding holiness of life. Everywhere we hear people saying, "Isn't it wonderful? So-and-so has come to an understanding of the doctrines of grace!" This is wonderful when the person is a true Christian. But all too often, "coming to the doctrines of grace" is perceived as being all that is necessary, and there appears to be little or no emphasis on a life of holiness. A bare acceptance of these doctrines is worthless on its own. "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ *depart from iniquity*" (2 Tim.2:19) – not just wax eloquent about predestination and election! The embracing of the doctrines of grace, without holiness of life, is nothing but a dead orthodoxy. While holding to sound doctrine in the head, people can yet be "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph.2:1); and while holding to true doctrine on paper, in sound confessions of faith, a church can be a "congregation of the dead" (Prov.21:16).

The great majority of those who profess to be Christ's people today – even within the most doctrinally-sound, sovereign grace churches – are slaves to the television, sport-idolaters, immodest in dress, covetous, etc., etc., "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim.3:4,5). When are we going to hear pastors speak out against *these* things – these *sins* – instead of only preaching against Arminianism? Let me be clearly understood: Arminianism *must* be refuted. It is a subtle and deadly poison. But this is not the minister's whole duty! Why do we see so many retreats and conferences devoted to the exposition of the doctrines of

grace, but none devoted to holy living and separation from the world? Is a minister declaring “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) when he strongly exposes the errors of Arminianism, but fails to speak out against the worldliness and sin to be found within the members of his own congregation? Having sound doctrine in their heads, they yet deny Christ by their lives; “they profess that they know God; but in *works* they deny him” (Tit.1:16). They name the holy name of Christ; but if there is no departure from iniquity, they are strangers to the Christ they name – regardless of all the head-knowledge they have of the doctrines of grace. Sound doctrine in the heart of a *true* believer will result in holiness of life! Too many are looking only at what a man believes, instead of also looking at how he lives. “If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor.5:17). There must be a biblical balance between doctrine and fruit. A man who is sound in doctrine, but sinful in practice, is not a Christian, regardless of how well he is able to expound the doctrines of grace.

What am I contending for, in these lines? In short – not just the form, but the *power* of godliness. As much as I love the precious doctrines of sovereign grace; as much as I love to meditate on them, to hear them expounded, to read of them -- I cannot keep silent when those who are sound in doctrine give no evidence of loathing sin and worldliness! What, then, becomes of their sound doctrine? There is much talk, but little or no *adorning* of the doctrine of God (Tit.2:10). All their words, then, are empty words, worthless without the adorning of a life of obedience to the Lord.

Contrary to what many within sovereign grace churches seem to think, fellowship may not be had merely on the basis of agreement on the doctrines of grace! Correctly separating from those who hold to false doctrine, many who hold to election are quite prepared to fellowship with any others who hold to this doctrine, no other test being applied. This is just as sinful as fellowshiping with heretics! Once again let it be said: soundness in doctrine is not an infallible proof of regeneration. If one makes an assent to the doctrines of grace almost the sole basis for fellowship, then one has erred as much as those who make some other matter the sole requirement for fellowship. An assent to the doctrines of grace appears to have become the standard around which many are prepared to gather for fellowship. It *is* vital – but it is not all! Holiness of life is just as vital!

It is time that those who profess to love the blessed doctrines of sovereign grace take a good, hard, long look at the lack of *fruit* being produced by the great majority of those who claim to hold to these truths. May these truths be proclaimed loudly and clearly in our day – but what God has joined together, let not man put asunder! “Love not the world” (1 Jn.2:15) is forever wedded to “the love of the truth” (2 Thess.2:10). Where these doctrines are received into the heart of a true believer, they will bear fruit. But where they are merely held to intellectually, and produce no fruit, there is no work of grace. Let us not hear less of the doctrines of grace – but let us hear more of biblical separation and holiness! Only then will there be a biblical balance. Churches would shrink in size, but Christ and His Gospel would be glorified by the faithful remnant, the truly regenerate. Tragically, most quite obviously prefer large numbers to faithful and godly disciples.

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