

Common Grace?

The phrase “common grace” has become standard in most “Calvinist” or “Reformed” or “Sovereign Grace” circles. It is accepted without question by the duped masses in fashionable Calvinistic “churches” who follow the popular “Reformed” authors rather than the Word of God. And anyone who would dare question it is dismissed out of hand and called any of a number of derogatory names.

Call us what you will, we will follow the Word of God rather than the words of men. And, as anyone who is truly interested in studying the Word of God will see, there is no such monstrosity as “common grace.”

We must first define the phrase. The word “common” in the context of this phrase means “shared or experienced by all.” Synonyms are “general” or “universal.” The word “grace” means “unmerited favor.” So when one speaks of the “common grace” of God, he is speaking of unmerited favor that God bestows upon all without exception, a gift that is universally given. To the “common grace” advocate, this grace is given out of the love or beneficence of God toward all without exception. “Universal grace” is a more understandable way of saying it.

In fashionable Calvinism, “common grace” (the grace that is shown to everyone without exception) is contrasted with “special grace” (the grace that is shown only to God’s people). In fact, whenever you hear or read of the “special grace” of God, the heresy of “common grace” is usually not far away, either lurking in the shadows or brazenly trumpeted. For if God’s grace were always special and never universal, then the phrase “special grace” would be a redundancy.

What does God say about His own grace? If God, in His Word, never says that He shows grace to everyone without exception and always uses grace as a particular, non-universal grace, of what account are man’s vain imaginations about an alleged universal grace? Let God be true and every man a liar.

The Hebrew word translated “grace” is *chen*. The following are all the Old Testament passages that use this word. Because of space limitations, Scripture verses will not be written out, but please turn to these passages and read them: Gen 6:8; 18:3; 19:19; 30:27; 32:5; 33:8,10,15; 34:11; 39:4,21; 47:25,29; 50:4; Exo 3:21; 11:3; 12:36; 33:12, 13,16,17; 34:9; Num 11:11,15; 32:5; Deu 24:1; Jdg 6:17; Rut 2:2,10,13; 1Sa 1:18; 16:22; 20:3,29; 25:8; 27:5; 2Sa 14:22; 15:25; 16:4; 1Ki 11:19; Est 2:15,17; 5:2,8; 7:3; 8:5; Psa 45:2; 84:11; Pro 1:9; 3:4,22,34; 4:9; 5:19; 11:16; 13:15; 17:8; 22:1,11; 28:23; 31:30; Ecc 9:11; 10:12; Jer 31:2; Nah 3:4; Zec 4:7; 12:10.

The Greek word translated “grace” is *charis*. The following are all the New Testament passages that use this word (again, please turn to these passages and read them): Luk 1:30; 2:40,52; 4:22; 6:32,33,34; 17:9; Joh 1:14,16,17; Act 2:47; 4:33; 7:10,46; 11:23; 13:43; 14:3,26; 15: 11,40; 18:27; 20:24,32; 24:27; 25:3, 9; Rom 1:5,7; 3:24; 4:4,16; 5:2,15, 17,20,21; 6:1,14,15,17; 11:5,6; 12:3, 6; 15:15; 16:20,24; 1Co 1:3,4; 3:10; 10:30; 15:10,57; 16:3,23; 2Co 1:2, 12,15; 2:14; 4:15; 6:1; 8:1,4,6,7,9, 16,19; 9:8,14,15; 12:9; 13:14; Gal 1: 3,6,15; 2:9,21; 5:4; 6:18; Eph 1:2,6, 7; 2:5,7,8; 3:2,7,8; 4:7,29; 6:24; Php 1:2,7; 4:23; Col 1:2,6; 3:16; 4:6,18; 1Th 1:1; 5:28; 2Th 1:2,12;

2:16; 3: 18; 1Ti 1:2,12,14; 6:21; 2Ti 1:2,3,9; 2:1; 4:22; Tit 1:4; 2:11; 3:7,15; Phm 3,7,25; Heb 2:9; 4:16; 10: 29; 12:15, 28; 13:9,25; Jam 4:6; 1Pe 1:2,10,13; 2:19,20; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5,10, 12; 2Pe 1: 2; 3:18; 2Jo 3; Jud 4; Rev 1:4; 22:21.

I challenge anyone to find even a *hint* of common grace, of universal favor, in these Scriptures. Where do these Scriptures even *remotely imply* that God shows grace to everyone without exception? The answer is, of course, NOWHERE. In fact, many of the Scriptures that speak of God's grace put forth a vital concept that totally smashes the universal grace notion to pieces: Grace is *in Christ Jesus!* There is no grace that is shown outside of the person and work of Christ Jesus. God is infinitely holy, righteous, and just; thus, He does not show grace or love to anyone who has anything less than perfect righteousness. He only shows wrath. All who do not have a perfect righteousness are under the curse of God. God does not show grace or love at the expense of His holiness, righteousness, and justice. How, then, can God be gracious or loving toward anyone? It is because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ, as a representative and substitute for His people, suffered the full penalty of all the sins of all His people. And the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to all His people, so they are counted as perfectly righteous in the eyes of God's law and justice. Then, and only then, does God show grace! His justice has been satisfied, and He, being both a just God and a Savior, shows grace to His people.

Why, then, in the face of such overwhelming Scriptural evidence to the contrary, do people hold to the heresy of common grace? Why would such a phrase even be coined when God's grace in the Bible is always particular? As we will see, the "Reformed theologians" who have adopted this term and who advocate and promote universal grace are the unwitting agents of Satan to destroy the gospel. The true gospel is the gospel of grace – the one and only grace of God as manifested in the work of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Those who hold to "common grace" must either believe that God shows grace at the expense of His justice or that Jesus Christ's death in some way merited grace for everyone without exception. Let us take a look at how the "common grace" heresy seeks to destroy the gospel of grace.

On the official web site of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), one of the most conservative "Reformed" denominations, these stunningly vile words are found: "God's goodness to reprobate sinners may be considered the product of the cross. In that sense it might be said that Jesus died for all mankind." Are you shocked that the OPC would so blatantly advocate a universalizing of the death of Christ? Are you horrified that a denomination that is well-known for its adherence to the so-called "five points of Calvinism" would so shamelessly promote a heresy in which there is a grace that does not save that flows from the cross of Christ? Yet this kind of language has been used throughout the history of fashionable "Calvinism"; it is found throughout the so-called "giants" of the "Reformed faith."

"Reformed theologian" John Murray is often quoted in support of the "common grace" heresy. In his treatise entitled "The Atonement," Murray wrote: "It is true that many benefits accrue from the redemptive work of Christ to the non-elect in this life. ... Hence all the favors which even the reprobate receive in this life are related in one way or another to the atonement and may be said

to flow from it.” Stunned? Dismayed? Consider this: Why would a “Reformed theologian,” in a treatise about the atonement, which is the very essence, the very heart, the very core, the very foundation, the very cornerstone, the very crux of the gospel, even mention how God’s favor to the reprobate flows from the atonement? It is only to undermine, to vitiate, to destroy the very gospel he and all who hold to his views claim to proclaim. While Murray claimed out of one side of his mouth that Jesus Christ’s atonement is efficacious only for the elect, he also claimed out of the other side of his mouth that benefits accrue to the reprobate from the redemptive work of Christ and that all the favors that the reprobate receive in this life flow from the atonement. That precious flow of blood from the Savior is made common by the heretic John Murray.

Murray also believed that without common grace, special grace would not exist. He believed that common grace is a precondition of special grace. In his treatise entitled “Common Grace,” he wrote this: “Common grace then receives at least one explanation from the fact of special grace, and special grace has its precondition and sphere of operation in common grace. Without common grace special grace would not be possible because special grace would have no material out of which to erect its structure. It is common grace that provides not only the sphere in which, but also the material out of which, the building fitly framed together may grow up unto a holy temple in the Lord.”

“Reformed theologian” Louis Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology*, recognized that a “common grace” must be of the same essence as “special grace”: “The distinction between common and special grace is not one that applies to grace as an attribute in God. There are no two kinds of grace in God, but only one. It is that perfection of God in virtue of which he shows unmerited and even forfeited favor to man. This one grace of God manifests itself, however, in different gifts and operations. The richest manifestation of it is seen in those gracious operations of God which aim at, and result in, the removal of the guilt, the pollution, and the punishment of sin, and the ultimate salvation of sinners. But while this is the crowning work of the grace of God, it is not its only manifestation. It appears also in the natural blessings which God showers upon man in the present life, in spite of the fact that man has forfeited them and lies under the sentence of death” (p. 435).

Berkhof also recognized that “common grace” must be explained in light of God’s justice and holiness. In the same book, under the heading “Common Grace and the Atoning Work of Christ,” Berkhof wrote: “The question naturally arises, whether the manifestation of common grace is in any way connected with the atoning work of Christ. As far as we know, Dr. Kuyper does not posit such a connection. According to him Christ as the Mediator of creation, the light that lighteth every man coming into the world, is the source of common grace. [Thus, Kuyper believed that God shows grace at the expense of His justice. - mdc] But this hardly suffices to answer the question, how it is to be explained that a holy and just God extends grace to, and bestows favors upon, sinners who have forfeited everything, even when they have no share in the righteousness of Christ and prove finally impenitent. The question is exactly, How can God continue to bestow those blessings of creation on men who are under the sentence of death and condemnation? As far as the elect are concerned this question is answered by the cross of Christ, but how about the reprobate? ... These general blessings of mankind, indirectly resulting from the

atonement work of Christ, were not only foreseen by God, but designed by Him as blessings for all concerned. It is perfectly true, of course, that the design of God in the work of Christ pertained primarily and directly, not to the temporal well-being of men in general, but to the redemption of the elect; but secondarily and indirectly it also included the natural blessings bestowed on mankind indiscriminately. All that the natural man receives other than curse and death is an indirect result of the redemptive work of Christ” (pp. 437-438). Berkhof quoted William Cunningham, who said, “Many blessings flow to mankind at large from the death of Christ, collaterally and incidentally, in consequence of the relation in which men, viewed collectively, stand to each other” (p. 438).

According to Berkhof, the grace of God toward the reprobate is a manifestation of the same attribute as the grace of God toward the elect, and this grace toward the reprobate is a secondary result of the work of Christ. Are you amazed that this came from the pen of a “Reformed” writer? How amazed would you be if you knew that Berkhof devoted an entire fifteen-page section of his *Systematic Theology* to “Common Grace” and that this section was under Part Four entitled “The Doctrine of the Application of the Work of Redemption”? To Berkhof, common grace obviously belonged in the domain of the application of the redemption! Just how important was the doctrine of common grace to Berkhof? The section entitled “The Nature of the Atonement” is four pages shorter than the section on “Common Grace”!

Thus far, we have seen that common grace “theologians” *universalize* the atonement. How about the other doctrines of grace? We will see next that common grace “theologians” believe in a *resistible* grace.

Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology* unabashedly promotes this heresy: “Common grace is resistible, and as a matter of fact is always more or less resisted. ... Says Shedd: ‘In common grace the call to believe and repent is invariably ineffectual, because man is averse to faith and repentance and in bondage to sin.’ It is ineffectual unto salvation because it leaves the heart unchanged” (pp. 436-437).

Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* says the same: “In the fourth place, these common influences of the Spirit are all capable of being resisted. ... These effects the grace common to all who hear the gospel tends to produce. These effects it does in fact produce in a multitude of cases, and would produce in all were it not resisted and quenched. But it is not sufficient to raise the spiritually dead; to change the heart, and to produce regeneration ...” (Vol. 2, pp. 674, 677).

“Calvinist theologian” W.G.T. Shedd, in his *Dogmatic Theology*, made an even more appalling statement: “The non-elect receives common grace, and common grace would incline the human will if it were not defeated by the human will. If the sinner should make no hostile opposition, common grace would be equivalent to saving grace” (Vol. 2, p. 483).

Do you see what Shedd was saying here? He was saying that God’s grace, when resisted, is common grace, and when not resisted, is saving grace! He was saying that common grace *would be* saving grace were this grace not resisted! This comes from a “Calvinist” who claimed to

believe in irresistible grace! But what he did was *rename* the resistible grace as “common grace” in order to still claim belief in the doctrine of irresistible grace! This is nothing but Arminianism renamed! Shocked? Dismayed?

How about the doctrine of Total Depravity? Do the common grace advocates believe that “*There is not [one] understanding, there is not [one] seeking God. All turned away, [they] became worthless together, not [one is] doing goodness, not so much as one*” (Rom. 3:12)?

Here is Berkhof: “It is due to common grace that man still retains some sense of the true, the good, and the beautiful, often appreciates these to a rather surprising degree, and reveals a desire for truth, for external morality, and even for certain forms of religion” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 442).

According to Berkhof, unregenerate man’s outward morality and even his false religion and desire for “truth” without belief of the gospel are *good things* that show God’s *favor* toward him!

We now turn to Charles Hodge. Hodge’s main premise was that common grace is the work of the Holy Spirit on the minds of both the regenerate and unregenerate: “A work of grace is the work of the Holy Spirit; the means of grace, are the means by which, or in connection with which, the influence of the Spirit is conveyed or exercised. By common grace, therefore, is meant the influence of the Spirit, which in a greater or less measure, is granted to all who hear the truth. ... By grace, therefore, in this connection is meant the influence of the Spirit of God on the minds of men. ... That there is a divine influence of the Spirit granted to all men, is plain both from Scripture and from experience” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, pp. 654-655, 668).

From this starting point, Hodge wrote that one manifestation of God’s common grace is “temporary faith founded on moral convictions” and went on to say that “the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth, of holiness, and of life in all its forms, is present with every human mind, enforcing truth, restraining from evil, exciting to good, and imparting wisdom or strength, when, where, and in what measure seemeth to Him good. In this sphere also He divides ‘to every man severally as He will.’ (1 Cor. xii. 11.) This is what in theology is called common grace. ... As God is everywhere present in the material world, guiding its operations according to the laws of nature; so He is everywhere present with the minds of men, as the Spirit of truth and goodness, operating on them according to the laws of their free moral agency, inclining them to good and restraining them from evil. ... No one can recall the time when he was not led to serious thoughts, to anxious inquiries, to desires and efforts, which he could not rationally refer to the operation of natural causes. These effects are not due to the mere moral influence of the truth, or to the influence of other men over our minds, or to the operation of the circumstances in which we may be placed. There is something in the nature of those experiences, and of the way in which they come and go, which proves that they are due to the operation of the Spirit of God. ... The moral conviction of the truth, the excitement of all the natural affections, temporary faith, repentance, and reformation. ... Whenever and wherever the Spirit has been manifested to a degree in any measure analogous to the revelation of his presence and power on the day of Pentecost, while many have been truly born of God, more have usually been the subjects of influences which did

not issue in genuine conversion. The evidence therefore from Scripture, and from experience, is clear that the Holy Spirit is present with every human mind, and enforces, with more or less power, whatever moral or religious truth the mind may have before it. ... To the same divine agent is due specially that general fear of God, and that religious feeling which prevail among men, and which secure for the rites and services of religion in all its forms, the decorous or more serious attention which they receive. ... The Scriptures refer to this general influence of the Spirit those religious experiences, varied in character and degree, which so often occur where genuine conversion, or regeneration does not attend or follow. To this reference has already been made in a general way as proof of the doctrine of common grace. The great diversity of these religious experiences is due no doubt partly to the different degrees of religious knowledge which men possess; partly to their diversity of culture and character; and partly to the measure of divine influence of which they are the subjects. In all cases, however, there is in the first place a conviction of the truth. All the great doctrines of religion have a self-evidencing light ... In the second place, with this conviction of the truths of religion is connected an experience of their power. They produce to a greater or less degree an effect upon the feelings appropriate to their nature; a conviction of sin, the clear perception that what the Bible and the conscience teach of our guilt and pollution, produces self-condemnation, remorse, and self-abhorrence. These are natural, as distinguished from gracious affections. They are experienced often by the unrenewed and the wicked. ... It is also natural and according to experience, that the promise of the Gospel, and the exhibition of the plan of salvation, contained in the Scriptures, which commend themselves to the enlightened conscience, should often appear not only as true but as suited to the condition of the awakened sinner. Hence he receives the Word with joy. He believes with a faith founded on this moral evidence of the truth. This faith continues as long as the state of mind by which it is produced continues. When that changes, and the sinner relapses into his wonted state of insensibility, his faith disappears. To this class of persons our Saviour refers when He speaks of those who receive the Word in stony places or among thorns. Of such examples of temporary faith there are numerous instances given in Scriptures, and they are constantly occurring within our daily observation. In the third place, the state of mind induced by these common operations of the Spirit, often leads to reformation, and to an externally religious life. This sense of truth and importance of the doctrines of the Bible constrains men often to great strictness of conduct and to assiduous attention to religious duties” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, pp. 667-673).

This is so full of heresy that it is difficult to know where to begin. Hodge promoted the popular “Reformed” heresy of what is commonly called “Holy Spirit conviction” in which an unregenerate person is convinced of his own depravity by the Holy Spirit in an unsaving way. He had the audacity to use 1 Corinthians 12:11 to refer to everyone without exception. He said that when the wicked have temporary (i.e., false) faith and reformations in character and conduct, when they experience anxious feelings of guilt, and even when they engage in outward morality and the rites of false religion, these things are manifestations of the Holy Spirit’s work that show God’s *favor* toward them! This is blasphemy. The Holy Spirit would never lead people to a false, temporary religion. The Holy Spirit would never lead people to self-righteous morality. The Holy Spirit only leads people to Jesus Christ and His righteousness as the only ground of salvation. There never has been and never will be an unregenerate person who is under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. And when wicked people engage in religious and externally moral

behavior, these are not *good* things that show God's *grace* toward them; they are *evil* things that show God's *wrath* toward them! If Hodge's view that "great strictness of conduct and to assiduous attention to religious duties" of the unregenerate is an example of common grace, then the Pharisees would be a good example of common grace! Was God showing grace to the Pharisees when they engaged in their self-righteous religion? "*Offspring of vipers*" (Mat 3:7; 12:34; 23:33; Luk 3:7), "*son of Hell*" (Mat 23:15), "*You are of the devil as father*" (Joh 8:44) puts that question to rest.

Murray, in "Common Grace," lauded his god's non-saving grace: "Unregenerate men receive operations and influences of the Spirit in connection with the administration of the gospel, influences that result in experience of the power and glory of the gospel, yet influences which do not issue in genuine and lasting conversion and are finally withdrawn. ... It is here that we find non-saving grace at its very apex. We cannot conceive of anything, that falls short of salvation, more exalted in its character."

Believe it or not, both Murray and Berkhof used Romans 2:14-15 as proof that God showed common grace to Gentiles because they "*shew the work of the law written in their hearts*" and "*do by nature the things contained in the law*"! Was this a manifestation of God's *favor* toward the wicked Gentiles? In the two verses before their supposed "proof text," we have the answer: "*For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; For not the hearers of the law [are] just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified*" (Rom 2:12-13).

Even harder to believe is the fact that Murray used 2 Peter 2:20-22 as proof that God showed common grace to those who "*escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" and "*have known the way of righteousness*"! We see what kind of wilful blindness to the Scriptures right in front of one's face the common grace advocates have to engage in. For right in the middle of that passage, God says, *For it had been BETTER for them NOT TO HAVE KNOWN the way of righteousness, than, after they have known [it], to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them*" (v. 21)! So was their temporary escape of the pollutions of the world and their knowledge of the way of righteousness a *benefit* to them? Was it a manifestation of God's *favor* to them? Was it God showing *grace* to them? Was God being *merciful* and *loving* and *beneficent* toward them by causing them to temporarily escape the pollutions of the world and to know the way of righteousness? Or would it have been BETTER for them if they had NEVER KNOWN? Was God doing what was *better* for them or what was *worse* for them? Was God *blessing* them or *cursing* them? This one passage blows the "temporary faith and outward morality as common grace" argument of Murray and Hodge to bits!

Was the self-righteous religion of Capernaum an evidence of God's common grace toward them? Was God showing grace toward them when they witnessed the works of Christ? Jesus Christ said, "*And you, Capernaum, who have been exalted to the heaven, [you] will be thrown down to Hades. For if the powerful acts happening in you had taken place in Sodom, it would remain until today. But I say to you, It will be MORE BEARABLE for the land of SODOM in Judgment Day THAN FOR YOU*" (Mat 11:23-24)! Was God doing what was *better* for Capernaum? Was

God blessing or cursing Capernaum when all the powerful acts were done there?

What does God's Word say about the religion and morality and the supposed "desire for truth and good" of the unregenerate? "*Jehovah looked down from Heaven on the sons of mankind, to see if there were any discerning [and] seeking God: they [have] all turned aside; together they are corrupt; [there is] none doing good, not even one!*" (Psa 14:2-3). "*What good to Me [are] your many sacrifices, says Jehovah? I am sated [with] burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fattened cattle, and [the blood of] bulls; nor do I delight in the blood of lambs and he goats. When you come to see My face, who has required this at your hand, to trample My courts? Do not add to bringing vain sacrifice; [its] incense is an abomination to Me. I cannot endure the new moon and sabbath, the going to meeting; I cannot endure the evil assembly. My soul hates your new moons and your appointed feasts. They are a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing [them]. And when you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you. Yea, when you multiply prayer, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood*" (Isa 1:11-15). "*But we are all as the unclean [thing], and all our righteousnesses [are] as a menstruation cloth. ... And [there is] no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You*" (Isa 64:6-7). "*A good tree cannot produce evil fruits, nor a corrupt tree produce good fruits*" (Mat 7:18). "*For the mind of the flesh is death ... because the mind of the flesh is enmity towards God; for it is not being subjected to the Law of God, for neither can it [be]. And those being in the flesh are not able to please - God*" (Rom 8:6-8). "*But Israel following after a Law of righteousness did not arrive at a Law of righteousness? Why? Because [it was] not of faith, but as of works of Law. For they stumbled at the Stone-of-stumbling. ... For I testify to them that they have a zeal to God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God*" (Rom 9:31-10:3). "*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss because of Christ. But nay, rather I also count all things to be loss because of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count [them to be] trash, that I might gain Christ*" (Php 3:8). "*For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sin were working in our members through the Law for the bearing of fruit unto death. But now we have been set free from the Law, having died [to that] in which we were held, so as [for us] to serve in newness of spirit, and not in oldness of letter*" (Rom 7:5-6).

All of these passages are quite contrary to the heretical notion that the wicked can do any good, even in their religion and morality. Far from being a manifestation of God's grace, God says that it is all an abomination to Him, and all believers know that when they were in false religion, they were not doing any good whatsoever. But someone might ask, "Isn't an unbeliever doing good when he is kind to others? What about if he is kind to the environment or to his animals?" Look at Proverbs 12:10: "*The righteous knows the life of his animal, but the mercies of the wicked are cruel.*" Even the MERCIES of the wicked are CRUEL! His so-called goodness to others is actually CRUELTY in God's sight! So much for the notion that God's "common grace" causes the wicked to do good!

It should be becoming abundantly clear that common grace advocates do not truly believe in the doctrines of grace. They claim to believe in limited atonement, irresistible grace, and total

depravity, but they keep a universalized atonement, a resistible grace, and a partial depravity in their side-pockets to use when convenient.

How else is common grace manifested, according to these “theologians”? As we will see, the manifestations to follow are tied in with what has been said before.

Common grace advocates state that God has an *attitude of favor* toward everyone without exception. Murray, in “Common Grace,” defines it as “every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God.” The “Three Points of Common Grace” put out by the Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) define it as “a favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general and not only towards the elect ... apart from the saving grace of God shown only to those that are elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general.”

Does God have a favorable attitude toward the wicked? Let the Scriptures speak: *“And it shall be, if you will not heed the voice of your God, to take heed to do all His commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today, even all these curses shall come on you and overtake you: You shall be cursed in the city, and you shall be cursed in the field. Your basket and your kneading-trough shall be cursed. The fruit of your body shall be cursed, and the fruit of your land, the offspring of your oxen, and the young ones of your sheep. You shall be cursed when you come in, and you shall be cursed when you go out. Jehovah shall send cursing on you, trouble and rebuke in all that you set your hand, all which you will do, until you are destroyed, or until you quickly perish, because of the badness of your doings by which you have forsaken Me”* (Deu 28:15-20). *“For You [are] not a God enjoying wickedness; nor shall evil live with You. The boasters shall not set themselves before Your eyes. You hate all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those speaking lies; Jehovah will despise the man of blood and deceit”* (Psa 5:4-6). *“God is a righteous judge; and God is angry with evildoers every day”* (Psa 7:11). *“Jehovah tries the righteous, but His soul hates the wicked and the one loving violence”* (Psa 11:5). *“For the arms of the wicked shall be broken; but Jehovah upholds the righteous”* (Psa 37:17). *“For the perverse one [is] hateful to Jehovah, but His intimacy [is] with the righteous. The curse of Jehovah [is] in the house of the wicked, but He blesses the abode of the just”* (Pro 3:32-33). *“Hateful to Jehovah [are] the perverse hearted, but His delight [is] the upright in way”* (Pro 11:20). *“Everyone proud in heart [is] disgusting to Jehovah; [though] hand [join] in hand he shall not be innocent”* (Pro 16:5). *“Lying lips [are] hateful to Jehovah, but those who deal faithfulness [are] His delight”* (Pro 12:22). *“He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, even both of them [are] disgusting to Jehovah”* (Pro 17:15). *“All their wickedness [is] in Gilgal, for there I hated them. I will drive them out of My house for the wickedness of their doings, I will not add to love them; all their rulers [are] revolvers”* (Hos 9:15). *“And I have hated Esau and I have made his mountains a desolation, and his inheritance [to be] for the jackals of the wilderness”* (Mal 1:3). *“And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, those working lawlessness”* (Mat 7:23). *“For as many as are out of works of Law, [these] are under a curse. For it has been written, Cursed [is] everyone who does not continue in all the things having been written in the book of the Law, to do them”* (Gal 3:10). *“even as it has been written, I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau”* (Rom 9:13).

God does not show favor to the wicked. There is no blessing; only a curse. There is no love; only hatred. God does not show grace, love, mercy, or any kind of favor at the expense of His justice.

The *restraint of sin* is also claimed to be a manifestation of common grace: “God places restraint upon the workings of human depravity and thus prevents the unholy affections and principles of men from manifesting all the potentialities inherent in them. He prevents depravity from bursting forth in all its vehemence and violence” (Murray, “Common Grace”). “... those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby He, without renewing the heart, exercises such a moral influence on man through His general or special revelation, that sin is restrained ... Common grace, on the other hand, never removes the guilt of sin, does not renew human nature, but only has a restraining effect on the corrupting influence of sin and in a measure mitigates its results. ... Through the operation of common grace sin is restrained in the lives of individuals and in society. The element of corruption that entered the life of the human race is not permitted, for the present, to accomplish its disintegrating work” (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 436, 442). “... God by the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart of man, restrains the unimpeded breaking out of sin ...” (CRC, “Three Points of Common Grace”).

There is no doubt that all wicked people do not behave as outwardly wickedly as they could. They do not all murder and rape and engage in openly immoral behavior. But is this a manifestation of God’s grace toward the wicked? Does the fact that not all wicked people behave as wickedly as possible show that God favors them? Obviously not, from what we have already seen. All of the wicked are void of a righteousness that answers the demands of God’s law and justice. And when God’s law and justice have not been satisfied, there is no grace, there is no favor. There is only a curse and wrath.

This “restraint” of sin is also not by the operation of the Holy Spirit on the wicked. The Holy Spirit does not influence unbelievers to be more “moral” than they would be otherwise. It is by God’s providence. Why, then, does God providentially keep the wicked from behaving as outwardly wickedly as possible? It is for the good of His people. “*But we know that [to] the [ones] loving God all things work together for good, [to] those being called according to purpose*” (Rom 8:28). God preserves His people by controlling the actions of the wicked.

Related to the restraint of sin is the concept of *orderliness*, *government*, and “*civil good*” as a manifestation of common grace: “To the general influence of the Spirit (or to common grace), we owe, – 1. All the decorum, order, refinement, and virtue existing among men. Mere fear of future punishment, the natural sense of right, and the restraints of human laws, would prove feeble barriers to evil, were it not for the repressing power of the Spirit, which, like the pressure of the atmosphere, is universal and powerful, although unfelt” (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 671). “He not only restrains evil in men but He also endows men with gifts, talents, and aptitudes; He stimulates them with interest and purpose to the practice of virtues, the pursuance of worthy tasks, and the cultivation of arts and sciences that occupy the time, activity and energy of men and that make for the benefit of civilisation of the human race. He ordains institutions for

the promotion of right, the preservation of liberty, the advance of knowledge and the improvement of physical and moral conditions” (Murray, “Common Grace”). “... order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted ... *The performance of outward good and civil righteousness*. Common grace enables man to perform what is generally called *justitia civilis*, that is, that which is right in civil or natural affairs, in distinction from that which is right in religious matters, natural good works especially in social relations, works that are outwardly and objectively in harmony with the law of God, though entirely destitute of any spiritual quality” (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 436, 443). “... the unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good, can do civil good. ... God, without renewing the heart, so influences man that he is able to perform civil good” (CRC, “Three Points of Common Grace”).

There is certainly orderliness in most societies. Most of the unregenerate people abide by the civil laws. There are unregenerate people who use their talents to “better” society. Yet why would common grace advocates say that this is God’s manifestation of favor toward the wicked? Why would they say that they do these things by the operation of the Holy Spirit? Why would they say that these benefits flow from the cross of Christ? While seemingly innocuous to some, it is an insidious evil. They can point to all the “good” things in society that people enjoy, which cannot be denied, and then insert their heresy of “common grace” as an explanation. They are also eager to attribute *some* good to the wicked and to say that this good comes from the Holy Spirit, so they are *not all that bad* and are even *good* and *pleasing* to God because of the Holy Spirit’s operations in them. Thus, they can water down the doctrine of total depravity. They can also use the rationale of “common grace” to “enjoy” the wicked things of the world. And, of course, they can universalize the atonement.

Again, why are there, for the most part, orderliness, government, and law-abiding, productive citizens? Is it because God is showing grace toward the wicked? Of course not. It is because God is showing grace toward *His people*. The wicked do things for the good of God’s people. “A good [man] leaves an inheritance to his son’s sons, but the wealth of the sinner [is] laid up for the just” (Pro 13:22). “The evil bow before the good; yea, the wicked at the gates of the just” (Pro 14:19). “The wicked [shall be] a ransom for the just, and the treacherous in the place of the upright” (Pro 21:18).

Next, common grace advocates will always talk about the *God’s works of providence in creation* to try to sell their heresy: “The testimony of our Lord Himself, as recorded in Matthew 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35, 36 ... God is kind and merciful to the unthankful and evil; He makes His sun to rise upon evil and good, and sends rain upon just and unjust” (Murray, “Common Grace”). “... those general blessings, such as rain and sunshine, food and drink, clothing and shelter, which God imparts to all men indiscriminately where and in what measure it seems good to Him. ... To common grace man further owes all the natural blessings which he receives in the present life. Though he has forfeited all the blessings of God, he receives abundant tokens of the goodness of God from day to day” (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 436, 443).

Matthew 5:44-48 (and its parallel passage in Luke) is probably the most common “proof text” for common grace advocates in their attempt to show that God is gracious toward the wicked. They

say that God's grace is manifested in things like sun and rain that are beneficial to the wicked. But the common gracers are then confronted with a nut they cannot crack: If it is true that sun and rain are evidences of God's love and favor upon the evil and the good, what are droughts and hurricanes and earthquakes and tornadoes and floods evidence of? If the common gracers are consistent, they must say that the natural disasters are evidence of God's hatred, God's malevolence, God's curse upon the evil and the good. Universalism works both ways; if the good things given to all are evidences of universal love, then the calamities given to all are evidences of universal hatred. Thus, they must conclude that when God sends a tornado into the house of a believer, it shows God's hatred of that believer. According to this scheme, when God brings good things on the wicked, it shows He loves them, and when He brings calamity on the wicked, it shows He hates them. And when God brings good things on the righteous, it shows He loves them, and when He brings calamity on the righteous, it shows *He hates the righteous*. From one moment to the next, for both the wicked *and the righteous*, God goes from loving to hating back to loving again.

But God's people know that this is not the case. God's people know that He works *everything* for the good of His people, out of love and grace for His people, and that He works *everything* for the curse of the reprobate, out of hatred and wrath for the reprobate.

What then does Matthew 5:44-48 mean? Jesus commands His people to love their enemies as God loves His enemies. By nature, we were the enemies of God. God loved us when we were enemies (Romans 5:8). We are to love our enemies as God loved His enemies for whom Christ died.

Why does God give good things to the reprobate? Is it out of love and grace toward them? No – the Bible clearly shows that it is to harden them for destruction and for the good of the elect for His glory. In Luke 12:16-20, Jesus speaks of a rich man whose land produced much fruit, and he was able to rest and have fun. Did this show God's grace for this man? Was this “common grace”? After all, his physical needs were met, and he had even more than he needed. But what did God say to him? “*Fool!*”

Psalms 73 says this of the wicked: “*For [there are] no pangs to their death; but their body [is] fat. They [are] not in the misery of mortal man; and with men they are not touched. ... Their eyes go out with fatness ... These [are] the ungodly who are always at ease; they increase their riches.*” Is this a manifestation of God's grace toward the wicked? After all, they are enjoying life and have everything they need. Yet this was not the case: “*Surely, You will set their [feet] in slippery places; You will make them fall into ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away with terrors! Like a dream [when being aroused] from dreaming, O Lord, in awaking You will despise their image. ... For, lo, those who are far from You shall be lost; You have cut off all who go whoring away from You.*”

Psalms 92:7 totally destroys the notion that God shows grace to the wicked in giving them good things. The common grace advocates would like this verse to read: “When the wicked flourish like grass, and all the evildoers blossom, it is because God is showing His grace and benevolence

toward them.” But that is not what it says. It says this: “*When the wicked flourish like grass, and all the evildoers blossom, [it is] for them [to be] DESTROYED FOREVER*”! That is the purpose of the wicked’s flourishing and blossoming! God is giving them exactly what they deserve – flourishing and blossoming so they will become more hardened in their sin and unthankfulness, so they will be destroyed forever. There is no common grace here. Yet “*An animal-like man does not know; a fool does not understand this*” (Psa 92:6).

Tied to this is the notion that God is showing common grace by just letting people live on the earth rather than immediately destroying them: “There is restraint upon the divine vengeance, suspension of the full measure of the divine wrath due to sin. ... Were it not for this restraint the wicked would be immediately consigned to everlasting perdition” (Murray, “Common Grace”). “It is due to common grace that God did not at once fully execute the sentence of death on the sinner, and does not do so now, but maintains and prolongs the natural life of man and gives him time for repentance.” (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 442).

Is God showing grace to the reprobate when He prolongs their lives? The reprobate are “*vessels of wrath, having been fitted out for destruction*” (Rom 9:22). Their time on earth is to be spent being hardened according to God’s desire (Rom 9:18), in order for God to display His wrath and to make His power known (Rom 9:22), and also to make the riches of His glory known to the elect (Rom 9:33). The reprobate, during their lives, are being fattened for the kill. They are heaping up damnation upon themselves. The fact that they do not immediately go to hell after they are conceived is certainly not grace by any stretch. By living their lives, they increase their condemnation, which is exactly what they deserve.

Did God show common grace toward Judas? After all, God did not immediately destroy Judas when Judas was conceived. Not only did Judas live until adulthood, but he was with the Lord Jesus Christ in person, witnessed His miracles, and heard Him preach. Yet Jesus Christ said, “*Truly the Son of Man goes as it as been written concerning Him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It were GOOD for him if that man had NEVER BEEN BORN*” (Mar 14:21)! Was God doing what was *better* for Judas by prolonging his life? Was God *blessing* or *cursing* Judas by causing him not only to live but to live with Jesus Christ Himself and to hear the gospel right from the mouth of Christ?

Finally, common grace heretics say that God shows grace to the reprobate in the *well-meant offer of the gospel*. This is called the “free offer” by most common gracers. (See the booklet entitled “The Free Offer and Conditionalism” published by True Gospel Publications.) It is not surprising that John Murray is one of the most well-known proponents of this heresy. He and Ned Stonehouse wrote a treatise for the OPC entitled “The Free Offer of the Gospel” in which they wrote, “The full and free offer of the gospel is a grace bestowed upon all. Such grace is necessarily a manifestation of love or lovingkindness in the heart of God. And this lovingkindness is revealed to be of a character or kind that is correspondent with the grace bestowed. The grace offered is nothing less than salvation in its richness and fulness. The love or lovingkindness that lies back of that offer is not anything less; it is the will to that salvation. In other words, it is Christ in all the glory of his person and in all the perfection of his finished work

whom God offers in the gospel. The loving and benevolent will that is the source of that offer and that grounds its veracity and reality is the will to the possession of Christ and the enjoyment of salvation that resides in him.” Murray and Stonehouse put forth the heresy that God shows grace to and desires the salvation of everyone without exception who hears the gospel.

Berkhof wrote that the term “common grace” is “used to denote a grace that is common to the elect and the non-elect that are living under the gospel, such as the external gospel call that comes to both alike” (*Systematic Theology*, pp. 435-436). In the CRC’s “Three Points of Common Grace,” the “general offer of the Gospel” is put forth as a proof of the “favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general.”

Was God showing common grace to the reprobate who heard apostles preach the gospel? Jesus Christ said, “*And whoever will not receive you, nor will hear your words, having gone out of that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Truly I say to you, It will be more bearable to the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in Judgment Day than for that city*” (*Mat 10:15*)! Was it *better* for the reprobate that they heard the gospel preached? Was God *blessing* them by having the gospel preached to them, or was He *cursing* them? And as we saw before, Judas sat under Jesus Christ’s gospel preaching, but it would have been better for him if he had never been born.

The well-meant offer is connected with the aforementioned universal atonement and resistible grace. The preacher universalizes the atonement by telling all without exception that Christ’s death is available for them (*à la* Thomas Boston). And the grace shown in the offer can be resisted by the sinner. It is just a fancier version of Arminianism.

The truth is that the preaching of the gospel to the reprobate is meant to harden them for destruction: “*For we are a sweet smell to God because of Christ in those being saved, and in those being lost; to the one, an odor of death unto death, and to the other, an odor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?*” (*2Co 2:15-16*).

Common grace has absolutely no basis in Scripture. It is antithetical to Scripture. It is opposed to God’s holiness and justice. It is destructive of the true gospel of true grace. God’s grace is NEVER common.

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