

# SUMMARY & ANALYSIS OF "COMMON GRACE"

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# WHY DID THE THEORY OF "COMMON GRACE" ARISE?

## COMMON GRACE RELATES TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE

- PROVIDENCE means God provides for all His creatures.
  - God cares for (upholds/preserves) not only the elect whom He loves, but also the reprobate whom He hates.
  - God gives life, health, food, successes, talents, joys, etc. both to His chosen people, and also to the wicked.
- QUESTION: Does God's care of all creatures demonstrate that He loves them all and is gracious to them all?
  - If so, then the view of "common grace" is correct – that God is gracious/favorable to all mankind.
  - If not, then how do we explain the things that God does for and gives to the wicked/reprobate?

# THE “THREE POINTS OF COMMON GRACE” OF THE C.R.C.

## • HISTORY

- Adopted by the Synod of the CRC in Nth. America in 1924.
- Opposed by Rev’s H. Hoeksema, H. Danhof, and G. Ophoff.
- These men and their consistories were deposed by Classis.
- This led to the beginning of the PRCA denomination.

## • THE THREE POINTS (in summary)

1. God’s grace is common to all men – to both elect & reprobate.
2. The Spirit restrains sin in the hearts of all – also in reprobates.
3. An unregenerate (unsaved) person is able to do good works.

# THE IDEA OF A “COMMON GRACE” OF GOD

- God is gracious to all mankind in the world.
  - He is gracious to the elect, and also to the reprobate.
  - He is gracious to the righteous, and also to the wicked.
- What is the evidence/proof of God’s “common” grace?
  - He bestows on all men alike the things of this present life.
  - E.g., rain, sunshine, food, earthly success, pleasure, etc.
- God’s common grace is limited to earthly life & history.
  - God shows His common grace to the wicked now.
  - But the wicked will eternally be the objects of God’s wrath.

# SCRIPTURAL AND REFORMED RESPONSE TO COMMON GRACE

1. IT CREATES CONTRADICTION AND CHANGE IN GOD
2. IT IS NOT SUPPORTED BY THE WORD OF GOD
3. IT CONFUSES "GRACE" AND "THINGS"
4. IT DENIES THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF MAN
5. IT IS A SERIOUS ATTACK ON THE GOSPEL

# (1) IT CREATES CONTRADICTION AND CHANGE IN GOD

- Error: Now in time, God is gracious and loving to all. But at the end of their lives and of time, God will send reprobates to hell.
- Truth is, God is immutable.
  - **Numbers 23:19** – *God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*
  - **Malachi 3:6** – *For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*
  - **Hebrews 13:8** – *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*
  - **James 1:17** – *... the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

# (2) IT IS NOT SUPPORTED BY THE WORD OF GOD

- God is never gracious to reprobates, but always hates them.
  - Psalms 5:5 – God hates all workers of iniquity.
  - Psalm 11:5 – God hates the wicked and those who love violence.
  - Proverbs 3:33 – God’s curse is in the house of the wicked.
  - Romans 9:13 – God hated Esau.
  - I Peter 3:12 – God is against them that do evil.
- God’s grace (unmerited favor) is only toward the elect.
  - God’s grace is always PARTICULAR.
  - Proverbs 3:33, Romans 9:13, I Peter 3:12.

# (3) IT CONFUSES “GRACE” AND “THINGS”

- Grace is not in things.
  - If grace is in things, then you would only receive grace from God when He gives/sends you good things.
  - And if you receive evil/bad things in life, then you are the object of God’s curse and hatred.
- Truth: The things God gives are simply means to an end.
  - Everything God gives the elect is a means for their salvation.
  - Everything God gives the reprobate is for their condemnation.
- Truth: Grace is not an object/thing, but an attitude of God – an attitude of undeserved favor.



*Just as it is evident from Scripture and experience that the evil things of this present life, such as sickness, pain, sorrow, adversity, poverty, yea, even death, are not sent to the godly in God's wrath and to curse them, so it must be evident that the good things of this present life are not sent to the wicked in God's favor and to bless them. We must not confuse grace and things.*

*Rev. H. Hoeksema, Ready To Give An Answer, p. 67*

*The important question is: What is God's attitude toward an individual when He gives something (whether it is good or evil) to that individual?*

# EXPLANATION OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THE REPROBATE

- God, in His providence, does give good things to the reprobate. Rain, sun, health, food, riches, etc., are good gifts (James 1:17).
- But while the elect and reprobate have many things in common (i.e., earthly things), they do not have God's grace in common.
  - The grace of God is His attitude of favor. Grace is not common (for all men), but particular (only for the elect).
  - God never has a favorable attitude toward the reprobate wicked when He gives good things to them. God always hates them.
- The question is, *WHY does God give good things to the wicked?* For their condemnation & destruction (Ps. 69:22, 73:17-20, 92:7).

**CONCLUSION:** God's providence is common to all men,  
but God's grace is not common to all men!

*A common providence is not the same thing as a common grace, and the two should not be confused.*

*Rev. R. Hanko, Doctrine According To Godliness, p. 96*

*Providence is divine power that keeps all things in existence and governs them. Grace, which carries out the work of redemption, is divine power that blesses and saves guilty, depraved sinners.*

*Prof. David J. Engelsma, Common Grace Revisited, p. 58*

*The elect and the reprobate, the righteous and the unrighteous, the godly and the ungodly have all things in common except grace.*

*Rev. Herman Hoeksema, Ready To Give An Answer, p. 62*

# JOHN CALVIN

*"How does it come about that God not only makes His sun rise on the good and the evil, but that with respect to the uses of the present life His inestimable liberality constantly flows in great plenty? Hence, we surely recognize that the things proper to Christ and His members also pour forth abundantly upon the wicked, not to become their lawful possession, but rather to render them inexcusable ... [and to] lead to their greater condemnation."*

*[Calvin's Institutes, Book III, Chapter 25, Paragraph 9]*

# (4) IT DENIES THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF MAN

## WHAT IS TOTAL DEPRAVITY?

- HC, Q&A 5 – *I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.*
- HC, Q&A 7 – *We are all conceived and born in sin.*
- HC, Q&A 8 – *We are wholly incapable of doing any good.*
- HC, Q&A 8 – *We are wholly inclined to all wickedness.*

## FOUR POINTS:

1. The whole human race is depraved. There are no exceptions. Psalm 14:3, Romans 3:10.
2. Every part of every person is depraved: heart, mind, body, etc. Jeremiah 17:9.
3. Every part of a person is totally depraved (not, every part is partially depraved). Genesis 6:5.
4. Every person is depraved from conception and birth until death. Genesis 8:21, Psalm 51:5.

# TOTAL DEPRAVITY IS DENIED BY THE FIRST POINT OF COMMON GRACE

- The 1<sup>st</sup> Point teaches the Well Meant Offer of the Gospel: *"... where the general offer of the gospel is set forth ..."*
- What is the Well Meant Offer of the Gospel?
  - The idea that God sincerely desires that everyone be saved.
  - God, in the preaching, is gracious to and offers salvation to all.
  - The natural man has the ability to accept this offer (a free will).
- This denies Total Depravity:
  - Because it teaches that the natural man (an unsaved person) is capable of accepting God's offer of salvation.
  - This means the natural man still has good in him (good desires and abilities), and thus is not a totally depraved sinner.

# TOTAL DEPRAVITY DENIED BY THE SECOND & THIRD POINTS OF C.G.

- **Second and Third Points:**
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Point teaches that the Spirit restrains sin in the hearts of all men – also in the hearts of the reprobate.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Point teaches that as a result of this work of the Spirit, an unregenerate person is capable of doing good works.
- **This denies Total Depravity:**
  - Because it teaches that an unsaved person has good in him (is not the sinner that is described in Romans 3).
  - Because it teaches that an unsaved person can actually do good works that are pleasing to God.
  - Cf. Matthew 7:17-20, James 3:11-12.
- **NB: Psalm 81:11-12, Acts 7:42, Romans 1:24-28** – these texts teach that God in His wrath gives man over to sin.

***According to this theory [of common grace] there never was a totally depraved man in the world since the fall of our first parents. For, from the moment of the fall till the present day, there is the operation of this restraining grace in the heart of man, preserving in him the remnant of his original goodness, according to which he is able to live a tolerably good life in this world.***

**Rev. H. Hoeksema, *Ready To Give An Answer*, p. 110**



# (5) IT IS A SERIOUS ATTACK ON THE GOSPEL

## 1. Common Grace denies the Need of Grace

- It denies man's Total Depravity, and any denial of Total Depravity is an attack on the gospel.
- If man is not totally depraved, the Gospel is not good news to him – or at the least, the news is not very good news.

## 2. Common Grace changes what Grace is

- By making grace to be in “things,” they make grace something other than the unmerited favor of God.
- By speaking of a “non-saving” grace, they make grace something different from the power of God that saves.
- By making God's grace “common” they deny that grace is only for the elect and that it is something unique & special for them.

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## 3. Common Grace (Well Meant Offer) ruins the Atonement

- Attacks the truth of particular atonement – there needs to be a universal atonement, otherwise the offer cannot be sincere.
- The result is that Christ's atonement is weak and powerless – He died for people who did not believe and were not saved.

## 4. Common Grace (Well Meant Offer) changes the Purpose and Effect of the Preaching of the Gospel

- It is said that God bestows grace upon all who hear the gospel. It is said the preaching of the gospel is grace to all.
- This denies that preaching (both as regards God's intention and its actual effect) is a savor of life unto life and death unto death.
- II CORINTHIANS 2:15-16, I PETER 2:7-8.

# (5) IT IS A SERIOUS ATTACK ON THE GOSPEL

## 5. Common Grace destroys the comfort of the Gospel

- Part of the believer's comfort is knowing and believing that God is always good, even when He sends evils upon us.
- If common grace is true, then believers would have to conclude, when they are suffering, that God does not love them.
- PSALM 73 disproves Common Grace and points to our comfort.
  - Verse 1 – theme of Psalm is that God is always good to His people.
  - Vss. 2-26 – the elect are tempted to doubt God's goodness to them.
  - Vss. 17-28 – solution is to consider everything in light of eternity.

*Providence itself does not reveal the love of God for anyone, just as it does not betoken God's hatred for anyone. That is, from the fact that one exists, is marvelously gifted, and possesses great wealth, one cannot infer that he is the object of God's favor.*

*Common Grace Revisited, pp. 59-60*  
Prof. David J. Engelsma

**Perhaps the greatest danger, though, in the teaching of common grace is that it destroys our comfort in God.**

**If rain and sunshine, health and life, are in themselves grace, what are we to conclude when God sends us the opposite: sickness, poverty, drought, or death? Are these things His curse? Does He send them because He hates us? If grace is in “good things,” have we no grace when God does not give us those good things?**

**Are we not rather to conclude this: that all He sends us, His people, whether health or sickness, poverty or prosperity, life or death, He sends in His love and grace and for our good (Rom. 8: 28), but that everything He sends the wicked, even though it be in itself “good,” is nevertheless for their condemnation? How else shall we be comforted in all our sorrows and afflictions?**

**[Rev. R. Hanks, *Doctrine According To Godliness*, p. 96]**