



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 163

Common grace – Common grace can be defined as that grace or operation of the Holy Spirit by which He bestows numerous blessings to people, which do not possess a redemptive significance. Out of God's good will flow good deeds, where God provides for the welfare of the whole human race (Luke 6:35-36). The common grace of God is manifested in innumerable ways.

Natural blessings – God's goodness is seen in the fact that even though people are born spiritually sinful, they have been allowed to continue living a natural life for a period of time. This represents the grace and longsuffering of God in not fully and immediately executing the death sentence upon sinners, and also providing them the opportunity to repent and be saved (Genesis 2:17; Isaiah 48:9; Luke 13:6-9; Romans 2:4; 6:23a). God's bountiful provision and care is also seen in the great abundance and variety of food sources and materials available in the world needed for the sustenance of life (Psalm 145:9, 15-16; Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:16-17). These are undeserved blessings flowing out of God's benevolence.

Sense of the good, the true, and the beautiful – Being made in the image of God fallen man still retains some sense of the good, the true, the beautiful. All human beings have some knowledge of God from nature (Romans 1:21), and an inward sense of right and wrong from conscience (Romans 1:32; 2:14-15). Unbelievers can still think, reason, study and grow in knowledge. Some have been blessed with great intelligence, grasping and appreciating a great deal of truth. We see this reality in the great abilities natural man has in the spheres of science and technology, resulting in great discoveries, inventions, and advancements in life, useful for all mankind. We also see man's skills and appreciation of beauty in the areas of art, music, literature and craftsmanship. However, despite all such benefits natural man suppresses the truth of God, does not honor and fear Him, and instead devises all kinds of man-centered false religions (Acts 17:22-23; Romans 1:18-32).

Restraining of sin – In addition to conscience, God has also instituted human government to punish wrongdoers, protect the innocent, and maintain good order in society (Romans 13:1-4). God uses conscience and human authorities to deter sinful actions and thus restrain sin in the lives of individuals and societies. This is God's gracious hedge placed around sinners and societies so they are not as wicked as they could be. Sometimes God does punish people and societies by stepping aside and removing His hedge of grace, giving them over to greater wickedness (Psalm 81:10-12; Romans 1:24-28).

Outward good deeds – Reformed theology maintains that fallen man is capable of and does perform things which are in some sense good, noble and useful, such as loving their families, being upstanding citizens and hardworking employees, helping others, being charitable and volunteering for good humanitarian causes (Luke 6:32-34; 11:11-13). The reason we see manifestations of such love, loyalty, beauty and goodness in humanity, is that these are all expressions of God's common grace on all mankind, for even after the fall human beings bear the image of God, albeit badly corrupted. However all such actions are classified as natural good or civic virtues, conducted only on the horizontal level, bringing blessings to others. But such actions are not spiritually or morally good, for they do not stem from the desire to love, please and glorify God. These have no vertical aspect to them, and thus are morally worthless and unacceptable before God (1 Samuel 16:7; Mark 12:30; Romans 3:12).

God's common grace poured upon all mankind demonstrates His love, goodness and generosity toward His creatures; it displays His mercy and longsuffering, delaying the final punishment of the wicked; and it shows the justice of His wrath and condemnation, for after receiving all such benefits sinful man continues in his idolatry, refusing the proper gratitude and worship he owes to God. And ultimately the common grace of God manifests the glory of God, for all that is good, true and beautiful in this fallen world flows from God Himself, demonstrating His majesty, holiness, wisdom and power.