

- I. Session 52: The Grace of God Part 4: Common Grace Part 1: God's restraint of sin
- a. Review: We have been looking at the grace of God for the fourth week. First week we looked at the grace of God in the Old Testament. The second week we look into the Grace of the God in the New Testament specifically, (1) God's grace is an attribute found in all three members of the members of the Trinity, (2) and the grace of God seen in salvation of sinners. The third week we looked at the grace of God in the New Testament specifically (3) God's grace and sanctification (4) and God's grace in ministry.
 - b. Purpose: In this session we shall explore the attribute of the grace of God as it manifest as common grace. We will provide definitions, note the two aspect of common grace and provide Scripture supporting God's common grace that restrains certain things and then we will draw implications of this doctrine to apply to the Christian life.
 - c. Recap of the definition of Grace
 - i. John Feinberg: "As for the concept of grace, it is best understood as unmerited favor. That means that something good happens to you even though you have done nothing to merit or earn it"¹
 - ii. That is, when we talk about God's grace we are talking about God as one who gives favor even when people do not deserve it.
 - d. Defining Common Grace
 - i. John Frame: "That there are forms of divine grace that God gives to the nonelect."²
 - ii. John Murray: "Every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God."³
 - iii. John Feinberg: "Theologians often divide God's gracious activities into two broad categories...Common grace refers to God's gracious activity in sustaining all creation, in restraining evil and wickedness so that societies don't collapse altogether, and in allowing mankind to develop and function in societies. This grace is called common because it falls on all members of the human race (and more generally on all creatures in the universe) regardless of whether they are God's children by faith."⁴
 - iv. My definition: The unmerited favor of God that both the saved/elect and nonsaved/non-elect can commonly be recipients of from God.
 - v. Why is this distinction important:
 1. We want to note here that the Bible teaches God has shown unmerited favor to everyone.
 2. At the same time we don't want to confuse that everyone being shown some favor of God means they are saved. Thus the distinction between common and special grace.
 - e. Aspects within Common Grace

¹ John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 354.

² John Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 429.

³ Quoted in John Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 429.

⁴ John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 354.

- i. Note: We can see that there's two aspect of God's common grace: (1) Restraining Common Grace and (2) sustaining common grace. Noting the distinction does not mean that both work together.
- ii. Even with God's operation of restraint, we see God restrains sin and also God restrains His own wrath.
- iii. When we look even more specifically at God's restraint of sin, we see He restrains the sin of men and also demonic beings.
- f. The Bible's teaching on Common Grace as restraining sin
 - i. What we mean by God restraining of sin: "God prevents fallen men from doing all the wrong they could do."⁵
 - ii. Note on method: We will be looking first at God's restraint of sin among humans and then God's restraint of sin among demonic realm. In both cases we will walk from the Old Testament approaching the New Testament to show this is a running theme throughout Scripture.
 - iii. God restraining the sins of men
 - 1. After the fall of Adam and Eve we read "*Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— 23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.*" (Genesis 3:22-23)
 - a. Already humanity is tainted with sin and God in verse 22 makes the observation that if man sin again by eating the remaining forbidden fruit they would live forever.
 - b. This is terrible news to consider: Living forever with sin.
 - c. Thus God's judgment upon Adam and Eve was also a practice of restraining them from further evil, one with a larger devastating consequence.
 - 2. "*So the Lord said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord [a]ppointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him.*" (Genesis 4:15)
 - a. In order that others do not commit the further sin of murdering Cain, the Lord marked him with a sign as a warning.
 - b. Again this is a good example of both God's judgment and restraining grace.
 - 3. Even God's judgement of Noah has an aspect of grace restraining evil when we read "*Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*" (Genesis 6:5)
 - a. Notice this verse states the reason for the Noahic flood is because "*the wickedness of man was great on the earth,*"

⁵ John Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 430. Note the following list of Scriptures is provided from Frame though explanation of the verses are my own.

- b. God's flooding of the world and repopulation of the earth with Noah's descendants was one way of restraining evil.
 - 4. *"Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also [a]kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her."* (Genesis 20:6)
 - a. In the context Abraham lied to King Abimelech that Sarah was his sister instead of his wife but then the King wanted to take her.
 - b. Here God is preventing King Abimelech from sexually sinning with Abraham's wife.
 - c. Note here how much of God's common grace restraining sin is already seen in the first book of the Bible which goes contrary to the notion that some people have that the Book of Moses is more of law than grace or mercy.
 - 5. *"for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."* (Romans 13:4)
 - a. In the context Paul is talking about civil government.
 - b. Note here that they are ministers of God who restrains evil by punishing it.
 - c. God uses the secondary means of government to restrain sin.
 - 6. *"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way."* (2 Thessalonians 2:7)
 - a. In the context Paul is talking about the sequence of events approaching the end times.
 - b. Note here that Paul states that God is presently restraining "the mystery of lawlessness"
- iv. God restraining the sins within the demonic realm
 - 1. *"Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your [a]power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord."* (Job 1:12)
 - a. Notice God is in control and sovereign even over Satan.
 - b. God even limits what Satan can do when he attacked Job.
 - 2. No doubt the demons recognized that Jesus' ministry was able to restrain demonic operations.
 - 3. *"And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day,"* (Jude 1:6)
 - a. It seems that when Jude described certain fallen angels "who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode," these demons were out of control.

- b. Yet God restrain their evil that's out of control by having them already "*kept in eternal bonds under darkness.*"
 - c. This restraint of their sins has taken place even before "*the judgment of the great day.*"
 - 4. "*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment*" (2 Peter 2:4)
 - a. This verse echoes the passage earlier from **Jude 1:6**.
 - b. I think this is referring to the fallen angels whose evil is described in **Genesis 6:1-3** with demons having sex with female humans in an attempt to destroy the Messianic seed predicted in **Genesis 3:15**.
 - c. Yet God is able to restrain their evil.
- g. Implication
 - i. Do you recognize God's grace in holding back your own sins? Do you thank God for it rather than complain to God?
 - ii. Do you recognize the role of government in restraining sin is sanctioned by God? Do you honor those in government who do so, acknowledging that God would even call them his "ministers?"
 - iii. If you want to rebel against God please be warned that despite being much more powerful than you will ever be, rebellious demons are also able to be restrained by God. Realize willful sinful rebellion is futile.
 - iv. Also be comforted and live courageously since God's restraint of the demonic realm is much more powerful than Satan and his demonic kingdom.