



**Collected Resources to Demonstrate that Our Church's Denial  
of the Doctrines of Common Grace and the Well-Meant Offer Are, At the Least,  
Within the Pale of Orthodoxy of the Westminster Standards and Historical Presbyterianism**

*(Slightly updated Feb. 2, 2022)*

[Since the time of this document's creation we have become an Affiliate Member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly and are working on joining as full fraternal members. Thus, we think it helpful to add the following here:

Our denomination, the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly  
<https://www.rpcga.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RPCGA-BCO-2016.pdf>:  
G4.3, under acceptable parameters regarding our Elders, page 122-123 (2016 edition):  
9.: "It is recognized that some persons use the term common grace to describe what is taught in WCF 5:7. Since the biblical use of the term grace refers to salvation only, and WCF 5:7 addresses God's goodness, a preferable term is common goodness."  
10.: "We do not believe that God sincerely desires the salvation of all men, but that the Gospel is to be freely preached unto all men, and it calls them from sin unto righteousness - WCF 3."  
Also, on pg. 111, from sample questions in the directory for examinations:  
49. "What is meant by the term common grace? What is your position?"

As well, since the time of the original making of this document, the following relevant quote from a lecture given at RPTS then reflected in an journal by the same institution came to our attention as relevant to add here:

—William Edgar, "Reformed Systematic Theology Textbooks: Handmaid to the Enlightenment Privatization of Faith", in *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* (Pittsburgh: RPTS, Spring 2016, Vol. 2, Issue 2) , 8: Online Journal: <http://www.rpts.edu/pdf/Reformed%20Presbyterian%20Theological%20Journal%20%28Vol.%202,%20Iss.%202,%20Spring%202016%29.pdf>

*"Nevertheless, great as he was, I consider Kuyper's movement to be a dead end for American Reformed Christians for both theological and political reasons. Politically, Kuyper worked within the bounds of a small continental European nation, with a homogeneous society and a political tradition that have little in common with the American Empire, an offspring of the British Empire. Theologically, Kuyper's movement used a flawed concept of "common grace" as the basis for cooperation between believers and nonbelievers in the public arena, a concept that continues to bear bad fruit both in the Netherlands and in churches of Dutch descent in this country, because it has been used to blur the antithesis between believer and unbeliever, and between Revelation and human efforts to grope for the truth."*

Our purpose with this document as we sought to be yoked to various Reformed/Presbyterian denominations was not to give an exegetical defense of our admittedly minority (in today's Reformed environment) position on common grace and the well meant offer; we had already provided articles by other men and denominations for that purpose and they are available on our website. Rather, we were endeavoring to give some collected information that would help us present what we believe is at the very least a compatible position to hold while subscribing to the Westminster Standards and considering ourselves within the pale of orthodoxy of Confessional and historical Presbyterianism (we have at times been charged otherwise).

First, we should state that the Puritan Reformed Presbyterian Church (PRPC) has held to this position long before Pastor Grant Van Leuven ever came to minister here (beginning in 2010). Pastor Grant did not bring this doctrine to PRPC, but it was one of the reasons we were introduced to him by a mutual friend in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) of Australia and why we called him to serve us.

Pastor Van Leuven came to his knowledge and position on common grace and the well meant offer while taking the Modern Church History class at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary (RPTS) that was then taught by Rev. Thomas Reid, who was still presently an ordained minister in the RPCNA and the Registrar and Librarian of RPTS when Pastor Grant confirmed things with him at the making of this document (and who was still teaching several classes and was listed also as an assistant professor on his biography page of the seminary's website). Following are relevant notes from the class that were Pastor Van Leuven's first reference to the topic that informed his ongoing thinking about it.

**Modern Church History, 2001 Edition (RPTS), Thomas G. Reid, Jr.** (On the title page, it is written: "Class Notes: Not to be considered a published work. Copyright 2001 by the Author"). [Bold PRPC]

- On his section on Scotland, section 4.2, Rev. Reid writes: "The first ecclesiastical crisis within the Church of Scotland erupted because of republication of one book, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* ... The identity of its author, usually given as Edward Fisher ... one of the Westminster divines, is still disputed. The 1718 reprint gained popularity among some in the Church of Scotland and so **the issues raised in *The Marrow* came before the judicatories of the Church of Scotland for four years**. The five main issues in the Marrow Controversy go right to the heart of the Reformed faith, and remain as fresh today as then. First, is assurance of salvation necessary for saving faith? Second, if the gospel goes to everyone, does that imply universal (or at least universalistic) atonement? Third, is the covenant of grace conditional? Fourth, can a person prepare to receive God's grace? Fifth, does saving grace always produce holiness of life? **The 'Marrow Men', as they were later called, had rather ambiguous answers to these questions, situating them close to the Amyraldianism then rampant in many continental Reformed Churches. The Assembly by 1722 was ready to condemn a number of their specific Reformed viewpoints, and rightly so. For the Marrow Men seemed to believe in a universalistic, conditional grace that is hardly consistent with the wonderfully reassuring portrait of God's sovereign grace sketched in the Bible.** They were opposed by an unusual association, including moderates on their left and hyper-calvinists on their right within the Church of Scotland. By 1733, many of **the Marrow Men had seceded from the Church of Scotland to form the Secession Church ... The Secession Churches** began as strong supporters of the Covenants, but had **a questionable commitment to the Reformed faith from the start, making union with the Reformed Presbyterians impossible.**" (59-50).
- In "The Low Countries", section 4.4, Rev. Reid writes on The Netherlands, in 4.4.1: "The second great leader was Abraham Kuyper ... a brilliant theologian ... Theologically, he formulated **speculative doctrines of presumptive regeneration and common grace. Especially in the hands of his disciples, these dogmas have had a detrimental impact upon the Dutch Reformed churches around the world**, as they have tended to lessen the difference or 'antithesis' between the church and the world. (56-57)
- In "USA 1920 to The Present", 4.21: "The Christian Reformed Church was disturbed by two

intertwining controversies in the 1920s ... the Synod of the CRC adopted ‘Three Points on **Common Grace**’ [1924], and made them mandatory for all office-bearers. Some ministers and elders, led by Pastor Herman Hoeksema ... of Grand Rapids, refused to submit to **this new creed**, and were removed from office. They formed the Protestant Reformed Churches. There are two issues here, one concerning church polity, the other concerning theology. The church polity issue is: Can a church court bind the conscience of office-bearers **beyond the confessions**? The CRC answer was: yes; the Protestant Reformed Churches: no. The theological issue is: Are the three points consistent with the Reformed faith? **The three points certainly go beyond the Reformed Confessions**, indeed, beyond Kuyper himself; the CRC said that doesn’t matter, the PRC that it does. These points say that: 1) God gives grace to all, elect and reprobate; 2) This grace restrains sin in both the elect and the reprobate; and 3) This grace permits the reprobate to do good. **The churches which resulted from the split [The PRCA] ... are often accused of being Hyper-Calvinistic, but that is not true, since they insist on preaching the gospel to everyone**; in fact, Dr. John Gerstner ... used to claim that they were the only denomination today to consistently preach the gospel in the Reformed manner! [This is interesting considering the footnote by Reymond quoting Gerstner].” (95)

- We share the above as it is relevant that Pastor Van Leuven was trained at the RPCNA seminary, where he first learned and was convinced by the above study and discussions. It wasn’t for some time that Pastor Van Leuven even realized he, holding to the implications of common grace and the well-meant-offer per above, was in a vast minority in modern Reformed ecclesiology. By necessity, he began to study the issues in great depth, and in so doing has continued resolve in his and PECA’s position, as presented by Rev. Reid.

Pastor Van Leuven had a conversation with Rev. Reid during the summer of 2014 to let him know he may be referring to him and his class on this topic for his communications with the Pacific Coast Presbyter as the church was petitioning to join the RPCNA, and Rev. Reid confirmed anew that Pastor Van Leuven would not be misrepresenting him. Rev. Reid shared during this conversation that when he himself was transferring his credentials into the Presbytery of the Alleghenies, he took exception to the RPCNA *Testimony* 10:3 on the floor, explaining it sounded like universalism to him, and there were a few questions but no debate or objections and he was received. This is relevant as *Testimony* 10:3 has been pointed to as a concern in discussions with PRPC. Rev. Reid also shared that in a recent RPCNA History class he was teaching, he learned in his own research that the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland voted 4-3 to reject essentially the well-meant-offer in the 1750s, and those in the minority left the denomination and later folded. This knowledge, along with the Church of Scotland also ruling against similar positions during the Marrow Controversy also in the 1700s, and the Westminster Divines not allowing efforts to reflect similar leanings that were being pressed by some of the Assembly (see excerpts at the end of this document from an article by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) of Australia), we submit that it is quite relevant that the church courts of historic Presbyterianism have ruled in favor of our position when dealt with formally. Rev. Reid also suggested that it is not irrelevant that the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland has no formal position on the topic. As well, while we do not want to imply we can represent the distinguished RPCNA minister of history, Rev. McCleod necessarily as exactly with our position by the quote below, we do present it as an example of how we think it better to speak of the issues that are normally framed in the phrases of common grace and the well meant offer.

**Alexander McCleod, *The Life and Power of True Godliness; Decribed in a Series of Discourses*; NEW-YORK: JAMES EASTBURN AND CO. AND WILLIAM GILLEY, 1816), 66-67:** “There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. These are called the **common operations of the Spirit ... they proceed upon principles common in the works both of creation and providence. The special or gracious operations of the Spirit, arising from the plan of redemption, and proceeding upon the principle of electing love in Jesus Christ our Lord, are always connected with the salvation of the soul. They are to be distinguished from the common works of the same heavenly agent. Some of the common operations of the Spirit, are moreover, so intimately allied, in their apparent effects, with his saving grace, and so frequently rendered**

subservient to the origin and progress of the spiritual life, as to be **confounded by undiscerning men with the actual effects of divine grace** in our conversion and sanctification. Of this description, are conviction, illumination, and reformation. **All these are good in themselves; they are beneficial to society; they proceed from the Spirit of God; true religion is never without them: But sometimes they, one or all, exist, disconnected with that grace of God which certainly bringeth salvation to man.**” Chad VanDixhoorn’s note seems relevant here: “In 1648 assembly member Thomas Hill explained that the idea of ‘common operations of the Spirit’ did not entail any understanding of a hypothetically universal extent to the redemption purchased by Christ” (Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith: A reader’s guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 156 (footnote 1).

Rev. McCleod, an important father of the RPCNA, obviously is using the phraseology of WCF 10:4 and WLC 68 that speak of the “common operations of the Spirit” in the non elect to discuss overlapping experiences of the wheat and the tares. This is very important for the discussion, because both sections specifically consider the non-elect in the outward call (the phrase “outwardly called” is used as in contrast to the inner call only for the elect, thus only well meaning for them). Here, the LC says they are willfully and neglectfully rejecting “grace offered”, that is, free of conditional works. The emphasis of these texts is that the non-elect will never come to Jesus Christ truly, thus they will never be saved, and clearly because God had no good intentions toward them in the outward call which simply serves as the means of the Spirit in the inward call to the elect alone, and ultimately intended to serve to judge the non-elect.

As well, when needing to explain why the world isn’t worse than it could be, and how God restrains evil, we think it better to refer to God’s “common operations of the Spirit” (per above), and God’s “ordinary” or “general” “providence” (WCF 5:3, 7) (see McCleod’s appeal to providence above), as well as to the mediatorial reign of Christ, WSC 26: *Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.* Over time, we have come to find most are not disagreeable to these disclaimers on preferred phrases instead of common grace (which we see as problematic). However, our argument that “well-meant” is not the same as “free” regarding the offer in the Westminster Standards meets with less amiable responses. Per concerns about whether we can affirm Testimony 10:3 as it is worded, the following by Robert Reymond has been shared with us by an RPCNA pastor who agrees with our position on common grace and the well-meant-offer as to why he does not believe he needs to take exception to this *Testimony section*, and we present it as our own explanation as why we don’t believe we need to be seen as taking exception either by our position.

**Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (A book required for Systematic Theology Classes while Pastor was a student for ten years):**

Under the “Exposition of the Allegedly Universalistic Passages”, he writes:

- “The God of eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11) never works to achieve merely general ends but always works to accomplish specific and particular ends. But the Scriptures in many ways indicate that the God of particular ends often accomplishes those particular ends through general means” (683).
- “... the God of salvation, in order to save his elect (his particular end), has commanded both that the gospel should be proclaimed not simply to the elect but to men everywhere (his general means) and that all men should repent (Acts 17:30). Herein, in this mode of divine operation, lies the explanation of the *universal* character of Christ’s Great Commission to his church: as the church of God proclaims the gospel of God concerning the saving work of the Son of God, by *every* legitimate means, on *every* possible occasion, to people *everywhere*, the Spirit of God, working by and with that Word in particular hearts, applies the benefits which Christ procured for them to the hearts of God’s elect. And if one will simply recall that the gospel proclamation offers Christ’s salvific blessings to people—whether elect or nonelect—upon condition of true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, it will become evident that there is no substance to the objection to particular redemption that if Christ died savingly only for the elect there can be no *sincere* indiscriminate proclamation of the gospel benefits to men in general. **Not only the church, but God as well, can sincerely assure everyone who hears the gospel that if he**

**repents and believes, Christ will save him [bold, PECA].** In this connection Roger R. Nicole urges that the gospel offer is to be universal with respect to range, time, and distribution. But he shows convincingly by using certain well-known analogies that the ‘features that some deem indispensable for sincerity in the offer of the gospel,’ namely, a provision, an expectation, and utmost assistance, all three of which necessarily to be coextensive with the offer, are not in fact indispensable for a sincere offer at all. He concludes that ‘the essential prerequisite for a sincere offer’ is

simply this: that if the terms of the offer be observed, that which is offered be actually granted. In connection with the gospel offer the terms are that a person should repent and believe. Whenever that occurs, salvation is actually conferred. ... Far from undermining the sincere offer of the gospel, the doctrine of definite atonement undergirds the call. It provides a real rather than a hypothetical salvation as that which is offered. It does not expect the fulfillment of an unrealizable condition on the part of the sinner as a prerequisite for salvation.” (684-685)

- “Some Reformed theologians teach that God can and does earnestly desire, ardently long to see come to pass, and actually work to effect things which he has not decreed will come to pass ... John Murray states in ‘The Free Offer of the Gospel,’ *Collected Writings of John Murray* .... That God represents himself as ‘earnestly desiring the fulfill[ment] of something which he had not in the exercise of his sovereign will actually decreed to come to pass,’ that he ‘expresses an ardent desire for the fulfillment of certain things which he has not decreed in his inscrutable counsel to come to pass,’ that he ‘desires ... the accomplishment of what he does not decretively will,’ that Christ ‘willed the bestowal of his saving and protecting grace upon those whom neither the Father nor he decreed thus to save and protect,’ that God does not wish that any man should perish. His wish is rather that all should enter upon eternal life by coming to repentance,’ and finally, that ‘there is in God a benevolent lovingkindness towards the repentance and salvation of even those who he has not decreed to save’ ... John H. Gerstner similarly asserts, in *A Predestination Primer* ... that God sincerely ‘strives with men whom He knows and has predestined should not perish,’ that ‘God, who knows all things, including the fact that certain persons will in spite of all efforts reject and disbelieve, continues to work with them to persuade them to believe,’ and that ‘God, who knows the futility of certain endeavors to convert certain persons, proceeds to make these endeavors which He knows are going to be futile.’ If one followed this trajectory of reasoning to its logical end, one might conclude that perhaps Christ, though he knew the futility of his endeavor, did after all die savingly for those whom his Father and he had decreed not to save. But all such reasoning imputes irrationality to God, and the passages upon which Murray relies for his conclusions can all be legitimately interpreted in such a way that the Christian is not forced to impute such irrationality to God. For these other interpretations I would refer the reader to John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Sovereign Grace, 1971), 4-6, 22-26, 28, 62.” (Footnote 25, pp 692-693).”

Also relevant, considering the RPCNA is part of NAPARC, is that Dr. Reymond was a minister within NAPARC churches. As well, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in America (also in NAPARC), while no doubt a majority in favor of common grace and the well-meant offer doctrines as a whole, does allow a Minority Report on the Free Offer of the Gospel that we believe well represents our views.

**OPC Minority Report at [http://www.opc.org/GA/free\\_offer.html](http://www.opc.org/GA/free_offer.html)**

**The Free Offer of the Gospel: Minority Report on the Free Offer of the Gospel**

2. (b) *Does God desire the salvation of the reprobate, or is it the salvation of sinners as sinners which Scripture represents to be the object of the Divine approbation and complacency? Surely it is the latter. Nowhere in the invitations, exhortations, commands, expostulations or offers in Scripture are the reprobate singled out and made the objects of special Divine concern. Sinners without distinction or discrimination are invited in the external call of the Word.*

Searching the Westminster Standards (in Bible Works), the exact phrase, “free offer”, does not exist (and of course, nor does “well-meant” in any way). The only places where “freely” and “offered” appear in the same paragraph, or “freely offereth” are:

WCF 3:1: Here, “freely” speaks of God’s own will to do whatever He chooses. And “offered” refers to violence not being offered on the will of the creatures in God’s execution of His will. The sincerity of the offer is not the referent with “freely” or “offered” considered alone or together, but rather God’s not being dependent on man; this is at odds with a portrayal of God eagerly anticipating the reprobate’s response.

WCF 5:2: Notice “freely” here again is related to God not being contingent on what will happen.

WCF 7:3: Here “freely offereth” speaks of the general offer to all sinners *indiscriminately*, yet requiring the condition of faith. And His promise to give eternal life (salvation) is only said to be given “unto all those that are ordained to eternal life” so that they are in fact “willing, and able to believe”. So “freely offereth” refers to an unconditional offer to everyone (other than the need to believe). Here, the *Sum of Saving Knowledge* would be helpful to consult, where the emphasis is on “whosoever wills” and a sinner’s sincere response to God’s wrath and offer of forgiveness; it never discusses God’s “internal” intention.

WCF 9:4: Here the free will is the sinner’s, to whom it is divinely given to by God (also in 10.1).

WCF 11:1 This speaks of those God effectually calls, whom He “freely justifieth”, communicating not God’s intent (it is free) but the gift of justification as “no strings attached”, no payment to be made by the sinner. WCF 11:3 makes this especially clear, “freely” being contrasted with “anything in them”. We are building the case that “freely” is always used in contrasting reference to “conditional works”.

WCF 11:3: Here is a discussion of the assurance of things being “freely given him of God”. Here again, “freely” is being used not in reference to God’s will toward the reprobate, but His gift being without cost.

WCF 19:7: Here God’s subduing a Christian to now do the moral law “freely” and not under compulsion, coercion, or condemnation -- free of ill will. It does not refer to God’s will to the reprobate in preaching.

WLC 32: The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant in that God “freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by Him”. Notice here the offer is connected with the provision to “mankind” in general (see B.B. Warfield’s explanation of “world” in John 3:16, for instance). The Mediator is presented free of cost before all sinners that some might embrace Him. Freely, not conditionally, is the point. Freely is not referring to God’s sincerity toward the reprobate. It is a sincere presentation in a general call for “whosoever will” respond to it. Notice faith is required in the general call, but then the question goes on to clearly focus on what is promised and provided to the “elect” who have been “enabled” and “appointed ... to salvation”, the special aim of the general call.

WLC 67: Here the question refers to effectual calling, and so specifically has in view God’s will and effectual execution of it toward the elect alone. So any discussion of God’s intent is restricted to His intent toward the elect. The reprobate (or even all mankind) are not in view in discussion of God’s “well meant” or “good intentions” in the Gospel call. Here, though, the “freely” relates to the elect’s new ability to actually will to answer the general Gospel call (effectually administered by the Spirit inwardly), and does not speak of God’s inner intent (let alone, to the reprobate). The word “offered” referring to grace is not connected to “freely”, but still it does refer to the offer of grace. Important to note is that the context is the effectual call, so the object of the special call within the general is restricted to God’s elect.

WLC 141 and 144 use the word “freely” but not remotely connected to the Gospel call.

WSC 31: Here “freely offered” is in the context of “effectual calling”, so the general call has only God’s intent to save His elect in view, and so it ends with “freely offered” “to us”. Freely offered again is

making an emphasis that salvation is not earned by conditional works but is received by grace. God's intent toward the reprobate in the general call is nowhere in view.

WSC 105: Here is considered what do we ask for in the fifth petition, and included in the answer is that God would, for Christ's sake, "freely pardon all our sins". The obvious connection again is the grace able to forgive in the end of the answer. Again, "freely" means a gift in contrast to conditional payment.

In conclusion, when we see "freely offered" or "offereth" in the Westminster Standards, "freely" is not referring to God's will or intention or "well meaning", even to the elect, as its direct referent, but rather what is being referred to is the freeness of salvation as a gift of grace rather than a conditional work. It is not commenting on God's intent to anyone in its direct usage, but rather the idea of "no hidden strings attached". It is communicating "free sovereign grace" against the idea of man's meritorious work. Salvation cost us nothing but to receive what cost God His Own Son. Thus, the burden of proof would seem to be on those who argue a "well meant offer" is inherently Confessional or obligatorily understood as a synonym with "free offer" or "freely offered", and that this is not rather anachronistic reading.

It also is important to look at the words actually used by Jesus and the apostles in the general, free offer of the Gospel. He speaks in "whosoever". Luke 8 would be a good example: the Gospel is broadcast to all, but not all receive it. There the sinner's heart is the heart of the matter, not God's disposition toward the reprobate in the offer. But of course we know the heart must be won by God for the seed to take root and produce fruit. Very important to remember is that Jesus says that many are called, but few are chosen: Matthew 20:16; 22:14. The general offer is sincere in that all who respond to it specifically will be saved and He will in no wise cast them out. But this is not the same thing as saying He really wants each person to respond, for if He did, they would, for He is never frustrated. He came to save His people from their sins, not all people. As He does not contradict Himself, and He is not a liar, He makes the general free Gospel offer of Grace "to whomsoever will". Brilliantly, Christ by His own example and preaching method protects us who model Him from an Arminian presentation. The general call is made in general terms that allow any to respond (and those who do will because of God's good intent to effectually call them within). "Whoever will", "As many as"; "Come unto me, *all ye that labour and are heavy laden*, and I will give *you* rest." The Gospel offer, rather than focusing on God's specific will in the presentation, impresses upon each sinner to sincerely receive what is indiscriminately presented as free for the taking.

In addition, it seems helpful to address here the concern often raised in this discussion about how our position can be held to be consistent with the Scriptures that speak of Christ loving or having compassion on people who do not appear to be the elect in Scripture. We submit the Westminster Confession of Faith 8:7 as sufficient to answer this thoughtful question: "Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself: yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature."

This paragraph in the Confession helps us understand why Jesus is said to not know something, such as when the Last Day will happen (Matthew 13:32, this is related to His human nature) yet at other times obviously knows things only God could know (John 1:47-51). Or how it can be said that God bled (Acts 20:28), and how Jesus told Phillip He was looking at the Father looking at Him (John 14:9). This distinction also helps us understand how Christ is truly with us in the Lord's Supper by His divine nature, not His human nature (which cannot be ubiquitous). We submit that this Scripture-informed nuance also is helpful to explain our denial of Common Grace and the Well-Meant-Offer, denying that God loves the reprobate in any way, and be consistent with Mark 10:21 when it says of the rich young man that Christ "loved him." Some who hold our view try and explain that this man must have ended up becoming saved (and thus be elect and Christ would have known this), but this answer is speculative. Rather, we can explain that Christ in His humanity must obey the second table of the Law and love His neighbor as Himself; as well, He had to love His enemy, just as He commanded all human beings to so do. Christ admitting ignorance on some things (per above) demonstrates that His human nature would not know if one is elect or reprobate, so He in His humanity must love every fellow human; it would seem appropriate

in this human and “ignorant” sense to say that Christ sincerely wanted the salvation of all his hearers and all men, just as we truly desire the salvation of all (not humanly able to discern the elect from the reprobate) and thus to operate as if all are potentially the elect. Still, even we have the understanding to pray and preach with “thy will be done” in view, knowing that the Scriptures teach election and reprobation to God’s glory. And perhaps we can still understand even in Christ’s limited human knowledge, He only willed ultimately even in the general offer what would be in full compliance with the divine will (eternal decree in election and effectual calling), so that His perfect human will toward the divine will in election would govern His human will or intent toward all men in the general call with its standard caveat of a response of repentance and faith to be realized for each listener (and thus the way He preached the Gospel in the qualification of “whosoever”). For instance, in John 6:37, Christ says, “... and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”; but this verse begins with, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” We can explain Christ Jesus having love or compassion on all men related to His human nature, while His divine nature hates the reprobate and knows who they are (“Esau have I hated”, Rom. 9:13, Mal. 1:2).

R.C. Sproul, while not speaking to this specific application of WCF 8:7, explains this paragraph in a way that helps us understand how we here apply it to such Scriptures often leveled against our denial of “common grace”: “There are times in the New Testament when the actions of Jesus are clearly the actions of one nature rather than the other ... we have to distinguish at times between the two natures ... Since there is a perfect unity between the human nature and the divine nature, anything that can be attributed to either nature can be attributed to the person ... As a matter of convenient theological shorthand, the Bible frequently speaks of the person when only one nature is involved ... It would be a mistake to think that anything known by Christ’s divine nature would also have been known by his human nature. Each nature retained its own attributes, and the incarnation was not a mixture or confusion of the two natures ... Jesus’ human knowledge was limited, just like anyone else’s knowledge ... the divine nature could communicate information to the human nature without violating his humanity ... It is one thing to communicate information and it is another thing to communicate divine attributes.” (Sproul, *Truths We Confess*, vol. 1, 269-271). Van Dixhoorn writes: “... we must not think that what can be said of one nature is true of the other nature ... something may be true only of one nature ...” (*Confessing the Faith*, 126-127). Similarly, J.I. Packer notes, “The Gospels show Jesus experiencing human limitations ... Incarnation means ... that the Son of God lived his divine-human life in and through his human mind and body at every point, maximizing his identification and empathy with those he had come to save, and drawing on divine resources to transcend human limits of knowledge and energy only when particular requirements of the Father’s will so dictated” (*Concise Theology*, 108-109).

Further, remembering that Christ’s limited human knowledge was yet governed by Scripture and what it reveals about God’s divine will in election, it is helpful to consider that Christ’s human will was, unlike ours, perfect and entirely consumed with the glory of the Father in heaven and on earth. Perhaps we should apply these words by R.C. Sproul in adjusting our own attitude on the above considerations: “What then is the purpose of the nonelect? As Paul explains in Romans 9, their purpose, as vessels fit for destruction, is to bring glory to God ... I remember talking to Dr. Gerstner and agonizing, ‘How can I be happy in heaven if I know that any of my friends in this world are in hell?’ And he said to me, ‘When you get to heaven, you’ll be so sanctified that you’ll be able to look down into hell and see your friend there and rejoice that he’s there.’ He explained that we are sinners and that our affections in this world are directed to people like ourselves. We empathize with the massive human rebellion against heaven. We are more concerned with the well-being of creatures like ourselves than we are with the glory of God. But in heaven we will be sanctified, and our concern will be for the glory of God.” (*Truths We Confess*, Vol. 1, 279). Of course, unlike the rest of mankind, Christ’s human will was fully sanctified on earth and thus He would have rejoiced in God’s glory of reprobation and mindful of it while He yet liberally presented the Gospel to all in His hearing as He intentionally and thus effectually saved “His people from their sins”.

We also share below a paper by the EPC Australia on these topics (representing their official position and requirement for ministers):



**Common Grace A paper by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church Of Australia on the Westminster Standards' position in relation to Common Grace. July 22, 1995 (Source: <http://www.epc.org.au//doctrinal/common-grace.html>).**

*In Scotland, in the early 1600's, John Cameron, a minister of the Reformed Church of Scotland, threatened to compromise the Reformed faith by seeking to retain various elements of Arminianism in his teaching about the nature of God and man. He was resisted in Scotland, but became a lecturer in France at Saumur, and influenced such men as Moses Amyraut, who founded the school of Amyraldianism, and John Davenant, who founded a school of similar persuasion in England. All these men, and those who followed them, including some at the Westminster Assembly, such as Edmund Calamy, Joseph Caryl, Jeremiah Burroughs, and a non-attendant but contemporary of the Assembly, the influential Richard Baxter, as well as the author (presumed to be an Edward Fisher), of the book, called, The Marrow Of Modern Divinity, believed in a universal grace, though they made their own various refinements of this teaching.*

*We believe that the present day views of common grace, in all its various forms, have their roots in the doctrine of the above men. Further, we hold that Cameron should have been opposed in Scotland as compromising the reformed faith with his universalism, as he was. We stand with such men as Francis Turretin, and the Second Helvetic Confession in their opposition of Amyraut and his teaching on the Continent. We fully support the fact that Calamy and the other Davenant divines were opposed by the Scots and others at the Westminster Assembly, in order to prevent common grace sentiments being inserted in the Confessional Standards. Just as the book, The Marrow of Modern Divinity, was opposed in Scotland by the bulk of the evangelical and godly reformed men in the Assembly both in 1720 and 1722, so we also oppose it. We of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of our day, oppose the teaching of common grace, and for the same reasons as our reformed fathers opposed it. It is a most serious compromise of the Reformed faith.*

*... We are aware that some characterise the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia's view on the grace of God, as an aberrant doctrine to that of the orthodox view of the earlier Reformed Church of Scotland, and to that of the Westminster Confessional Standards. We strongly reject this characterisation. Rather, we believe that it can be shown that it is common grace and its allied doctrines - not particular grace - that are aberrant from the doctrines of the Confessional Standards, and what the earlier Reformed Scottish divines believed.*

*We acknowledge that at the time that the Westminster Confessional Standards were drawn up, there were, and had been, English Puritan Presbyterians and Independents, who held to various tenets and expressions of common grace. We accept that there were a small number at the Westminster Assembly, whose actions at the Assembly, if not their writings, show that they, to varying degrees, believed that there is a non-saving love in the Godhead for all men, and that He desires their salvation.*

*We further acknowledge that because of this division at the Westminster Assembly, the Confessional Standards do not specifically condemn all the Amyraldian/Davenant teachings. Yet it is plainly a matter of historical record that while Edmund Calamy and others sought to have their views of a universal grace Confessionally expressed, it was strongly opposed by the Scots, among others, and that the final expression of truths relating to the grace of God, were all particularistic. There is no place, we believe where common grace and its related doctrines can be found in the Confessional Standards, though it was proposed that it embody such sentiments. The Westminster Confession, chapter 3, section 6 and 8:8, and the Larger Catechisms Nos. 57 to 59, are relevant to this controversy. They are positive statements of the Scriptural doctrine concerning the application of the redemption purchased by Christ ...*

*What we should once again note very clearly, is that the whole idea of common benefits or grace is specifically rejected in the above statements, even though Calamy at the Westminster Assembly sought to have them included.*

*A controversy over the doctrine of God's grace in Christ, and other doctrinal matters arose in Scotland in the early 1700's. Certain ministers of the Church of Scotland, Hogg, Boston, Erskine and others, promoted a species of common grace via a book called, The Marrow of Modern Divinity. The Church of Scotland, including the great bulk of the Evangelical Divines, soundly con-demned various "common grace" sentiments of the book. The book contained statements such as the following.[1] It taught of Christ and His work that, "the Father hath made a deed of gift and grant unto all mankind" ... "Christ hath taken upon Him the sins of all men" ... "Whatsoever Christ did for the redemption of mankind, He did it for you" ... "Go and tell every man without exception, that here is good news for him, Christ is dead for him". It is true that an attempt was made by several otherwise orthodox Evangelical Scots, to explain these "common grace" statements in such a way that they would be more orthodox, but the fact remains that this book and its teachings had a doctrinal background at variance with the historic reformed view, and was judged to be at variance with the reformed faith by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1720 and in 1722.*

*It is important to note that in 1831 these Acts against "the Marrow" were used by the then generally Evangelical General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, to judge John Macleod Campbell for teaching Amyraldian type doctrines. This man at his trial, sought to invalidate the Acts of 1720 & 1722 against the Marrow teaching, by saying that the Church had brought in a new doctrine and yet had not proceeded according to its constitution via the so called "Barrier Act", to ratify it. The Assembly in answer stated that their position in the Acts, and their rejection of the teachings of the schools of Davenant and Amyrault, was no new doctrine, but simply the declaration of what was already the teaching of the Church on such matters as the love and grace of God and the question of who benefited from Christ's atoning work. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church likewise believes that it adds no new doctrine to the historic reformed faith as it has come down to us via the Reformed Church of Scotland and the Westminster Confessional Standards, when it today rejects common grace.*

*We believe that while today a large number of professing reformed Churches would side with the teaching of the "Marrow", and its common grace, we of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church side with the earlier reformed divines of Scotland. We hold with their rejection of common benefits or grace for all men from the death of Christ, or from the character of God, as reference to their writings, and to reputable historians will show. For example, James Walker, the highly respected historian of the Reformed Church of Scotland, in his work *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland, 1560-1750*, Knox Press, pages 79-86, discusses this matter. We quote in part:*

*"It was a part of (a) scheme that Christ had purchased "common benefits", the ordinary temporal blessings of life, and that it is through His grace that the world is sustained as it is, and that all its bounties are enjoyed by mankind... Durham considers whether any mercy bestowed upon the reprobate, and enjoyed by them, may be said to be the proper fruit of or purchase of, Christ's death. And he answers in the negative. The ... fruits of Christ's death, he says, are not divided, but they all go together. So that for whom He satisfied and for whom He purchased anything in any respect, He did so in respect of everything. There may be certain consequences of Christ's death of an advantageous kind which reach wicked men. But that is a mere accident. Nay, to the wicked there may be given common gifts, by which the Church is edified and the glory of the Lord advanced-, but these belong to the covenant redemption, as promised blessings to God's people. It is argued further, that it is very doubtful whether, ... it can well be said that it is a blessing to men who yet reject the Son of God, that they have the morally purifying influences of Christianity, and are more or less affected by them in their character, or by any such blessing as can be said to fall from the tree of life. So, too, thought Gillespie, and so thought Rutherford. ... That the wrath of God did not straightway overtake sinners; that the sun shone, and the showers fell, and the harvests still came round to supply the wants of men, - was this not, in its measure, a revelation of grace? ... the idea was decisively rejected by the evangelical divines.*

*Halyburton handles the question in his own way in a famous excursus of his *Natural Religion*, - on God's government of the heathen world. "Is that government", he asks, "in any sense one of grace?" He answers*

*in the negative. Not any law of grace, but the law of creation, the law of works, unretracted, unmitigated, reigns everywhere outside the gospel realms; and even by that law, although its penalties are meanwhile suspended, a certain outward order can be still preserved, and a certain system of external rewards and punishments comes in.*

*A fair representation of the Scottish doctrines may be given in the words... There can be no proper enjoyment of any benefits from Christ, as benefits of His mediatory kingdom, but in a way of communion and fellowship with Him by faith. Thus, no common material benefits, as enjoyed by wicked men or unbelievers, can be looked upon as benefits... These material benefits, in the most general consideration thereof, do proceed from God as the great Creator and Preserver of the world, in which respect they are common to men and beasts. But more particularly, they always come to men in some covenant channel. They come to wicked men, or unbelievers, through the broken covenant, in the channel of its curse; and so, whatever material goodness be in these things to them... yet there is no spiritual goodness attending the same, - no divine love, but wrath."*

*... The Presbytery of the Church believes that it has not added to, or taken away from, either the Word of God or the Westminster Confessional Standards, when it condemns the above proposition.*

*The Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, enacted on the 4th July, 1970 not only the condemnation of the above and like propositions, but it further stated:*

*"That in passing such an act, this Presbytery believes that it has not imposed a doctrinal position not laid down in the Confession, but has rejected the imposition of an innovation in doctrine, which teaches that there is a duplicity of will and purpose in God, which is not taught in the Confession and is contrary to it."*

*The Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, meeting on the 22nd. July 1995, issues this paper to make it clear once again what its testimony is and witness in the matter of God's grace, and of our hope and salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Other Relevant Quotes Considering PECA's Position on Common Grace and the Well Meant Offer**  
[Underlines/bold GVL per PECA; note, we seek not to be anachronistic with some of these men, but there choice of words on what seems to be the same topic are what we are trying to mimic]

Editor of Thomas Ridgeley's WLC Commentary, Vol. 2, Pg 75, at the end of Effectual Calling (where Ridgeley uses "common grace" a lot but clearly he has the sense of general providence and often says "common call" referring to outward): "Grace which does not 'bring salvation,' and a work of the Holy Spirit on the soul which does not renovate and savingly enlighten, must seem, to any person who has studied the scriptures apart from the theology of the schoolmen, very extraordinary ideas." The Editor on page 76 makes a good point that God's general providence/moral government works on the consciences of all men who have His Law written on their hearts, and this explains restraining their evil.

M. Henry points out in his commentary on Gen. 25:2-6, a distinction of "common blessings" and "covenant blessings". Might be a helpful reference. (Pg 89 in volume 1). See also, his commentary on Genesis 30:27: "Note, worldly men, who choose their portion in this life, are often blessed with an abundance of this world's goods. **Common blessings are given plentifully to many that have no title to covenant-blessings.** (3.) That Jacob's piety had brought that blessing upon him: *The Lord has blessed me*, not for my own sake (let not such a man as Laban, that lives without God in the world, *think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord*, Jam. i. 7), but *for thy sake*. Note, [1.] Good men are blessings to the places where they live, even where they live meanly and obscurely, as Jacob in the field, and Joseph in the prison, *ch. xxxix. 23.* [2.] God often blesses bad men with outward mercies for the sake of their godly relations, though it is seldom that they have either the wit to see it or the grace to own it, as Laban did here. [Thus, Hagar and Ishmael are heard on behalf of Abraham].

Calvin on Gen. 41:9: “Although the Lord took pity on Egypt, yet he did it not for the sake of the king, or of the country, but that Joseph might, at length, be brought out of prison; and further, that, in the time of famine, food might be supplied to the Church.”

Mathew Henry on Gen 31:13: “Worldly prosperity and success are doubly sweet and comfortable when we see them flowing, not from common providence, but from covenant-love, to perform the mercy promised--when we have them from God as the God of Beth-el, from those promises of the life which now is that belong to godliness.”

Chuck Baynard, Westminster Larger Catechism Commentary.

Vol. 1

Pp 108-109, LC 33 (COG always administered in same manner?) “ ... (I deny special and common grace, but that is for another place) ... ”

P 142, on LC 45 (office of King): “Personally I do not recognize common and special grace, but God’s grace bestowed upon the elect, and that which we are want to call common grace is the over flow of God’s abundant grace so bestowed on His elect.”

Pp 201-202 on LC 63 (special privileges of VC): “As noted earlier I don’t recognize the so-called common grace as opposed to special or particular grace. Herein is my reasoning for this position, in that God’s blessings (grace) are bestowed upon the elect, God chooses the natural world He created for this bestowal and without constant supernatural intervention, the blessing of one will always have an affect upon others. Two passages come to mind here: Matthew 5:45 A...*sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*” If we consider a righteous farmer in need of rain, God could cause a particular shaped cloud to appear over just that farmer’s fields. However, God will not normally operate in this fashion, but bring rain to the whole geographical area around that farmer. God has not shown grace to the whole area as such, but blessed His own, and the benefit is enjoyed by just and unjust alike. We see the reverse where because of curse; God makes special provision for the believer caught in His wrath. The best known example is perhaps Elijah beside the brook and later in the widow’s house. In Matthew 15:22 ff we see this same principle, but in this case more focused on overt blessing (grace) as this woman correctly observes, dogs are permitted to eat of the scraps that fall from the master’s table. Thus the Assembly point out the church is under God’s special care and government. I would rather use the word personal here. I think this is where the idea of God having two kinds of grace, special and common has its roots. While the Assembly rightly point to the primary function of the church in evangelism, and that God has put into the hands of the church the keys to the kingdom in the effective use of the Gospel, I think they were less precise in the inclusion of the result of this gift to the church, with not enough emphasis on whom will come, with regards to salvation. These are the verses used by those who would place the choice in the hands of man and negate the election. Properly understood, they are not contrary to the TULIP, but rather add light so all may see this glorious flower of God. However, the extra care should be taken when using these verses less we propagate error rather than truth.”

P 215: (LC 68, elect only effectually called?): “Here we see one of the mysteries of God and in difference to the Assembly I don’t believe there is any common operation of the Spirit, just as I have previously denied common grace. There is a benefit, blessing from being among God=s people. There is a temporal reward for obeying God’s commands. The offer is free and many, perhaps even most hearing the word and seeing the joy of the believers around them will willingly embrace the concept, not for the eternal implications but for the current blessings and stability it brings to the turmoil of the natural world. We have all seen the operation of this within the visible church, and some who appeared anchored to the Rock of our salvation, so quickly turn aside and curse God when the trials of life assail them personally. They or a member of their family suffer loss of life or health, and suddenly, words of praise and Thanksgiving turn to words of contempt and cursing. Alternatively, those who appear to embrace the Lord from a place of utter depravity, at first sing of the great salvation God has wrought in their lives, yet all too soon return to the pit from which they were lifted.”

P 226: (LC 71, how justification act of God’s free grace): “(Some teach a particular and a common grace.

While not a mark of orthodoxy, I lean to there being no common grace, as most would teach it. That is not all are of the household of faith who are members of it. One of the first things of a pragmatic nature that happens upon entry into the family is an ability to examine self, and see the darkness that lies within the human heart. Rapidly afterwards is the ability to examine the fruit of our fellow travelers. (Have you noticed it is the new converts who see more of the hypocrisy within the family, than those who have been members for a long time?) The result is the truth of not all being of Israel (there are those who are not elect) can be seen and accepted as God's truth revealed in the Bible." P 235, (LC 74, What is adoption). I also do not like to separate the elements of grace as here another point is said to be an act of free grace. I have already commented upon the lack of need to prop up God=s grace by adding the adjective free in another place. While grace will be seen as actions, grace itself is not capable of an act upon anything. Though perhaps necessary for understanding and systematics, I prefer God's grace (singular) which will result in all these other things (actions) taking place. See previous questions for the discussion of particular versus common grace.

## Vol 2

Pp. 24 (on LC 95, use of Law to all men): "Thus as noted by the Westminster Divines and the proof texts cited, there is a good use of the Moral Law to mankind in general, the unregenerate, and the regenerate man. Obedience to the law results in blessings to man and the glory of God.

We will develop this thought further in the next question. For now let us understand that all of God's word is profitable to all men speaking temporally. It is this general application of God=s Word/Law and the blessings that result which lead some to a belief in a so-called common grace and love of God for the created that is the same as the love shown to the elect, but not a saving grace or love. As explained before, I do not think we can divide grace nor love this way. While God is gracious to all, though God is all of goodness and justice and can show no other side to mankind, regenerate or not, it is not of Grace properly defined."

On 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment, LC 110, pg. 104: "Though some who embrace my view of common grace will deny there is any blessing to the non-elect, I think there is a value and blessing from being in the covenant, though not of the elect, and falling away from God at the first real tribulation in life."

On 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, sins forbidden, LC 148, pg. 228: "The Puritan definition of piety was, "Piety: Consists in a firm belief and in right conceptions of the being; perfections, and providence of God."

Or, piety understands all is of God and His grace. I have spoken before of the deep understanding of grace in the Puritan mind and way of life. This understanding being the foundation for my lack of a "common" grace in my theology as noted earlier. Grace drives even the most stubborn to his knees in wonder at the awesome love of God bestowed."

## Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*:

Pp 53-54, "A gracious heart has learned this art, not only to make the commanding will of God to be its own will – that is, what God commands me to do, I will do it – but to make the providential will of God and the operative will of God to be his will too."

Pp. 57, "When your husbands are at sea and send you a token of their love, it is worth more than forty times what you already have in your houses. Every good thing the people of God enjoy, they enjoy it in God's love, as a token of God's love, and coming from God's eternal love to them, and this must needs be very sweet to them ... Other men have what they enjoy in the way of common providence, but the saints have it in a special way."

P 58: "Wicked men have certain outward things ... God by his free bounty gives it to them ..."

P 60: "The truth is that the afflictions of God's people come from the same eternal love that Jesus Christ came from ... grace enables men to see love in the very frown of God's face, and so comes to receive contentment."

P 68: "God has all things in himself, and you have God for your portion, and in that you have all, and this is the mystery of contentment. It makes up all its wants in God: this is what the men of the world have little skill in."