

**“What it means to be Reformed”; Session # 32 – Sola Gratia – “Common Grace Further Explained”, Prepared for the Adult Sunday School class on March 22th, 2015, by Pastor Paul Rendall.**

**Read Acts Chapter 13, verse 38-49** – “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” “Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: ‘Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish!’ “For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.” “So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.” “Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.” “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.” “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoke by Paul.” “Then Paul And Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” “For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’ “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they glorified the word of the Lord.” “And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” “And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.”

Also – Acts 16: 6-10 – “Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” “After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.” “So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.” “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night.” “A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ “Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

Also – John 3: 17-21 – “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” “But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

Notice that the language of John 3: 17 is “that the world through Christ might be saved. We know that the whole world cannot mean “the elect”, as there is no “might” as to whether they will be saved or not; they will most certainly be saved. The Son was not sent into the world of men to condemn the world of men (or mankind-sinners as Thomas Boston used to call them). He was sent to accomplish redemption for all of God’s elect, but He also was sent so that having accomplished redemption the Apostles and all Christians could sincerely offer the gospel to whoever would listen; that they might believe and be saved. This is common grace when Christ is offered freely to all. But it will take special grace, saving grace being given to any sinner

listening to the gospel, for them to receive the gospel and believe in Christ, so that they will be saved.

Listen to the Puritan John Howe on Common Grace: “Could you think the gospel was to bring you to faith and repentance, whether you heard it or not?” “Or (whether you) ever apply your mind to consider the meaning of it, and what it did propose and offer to you?” “Or when you might so easily understand that the grace of God was necessary to make it effectual to you, and that it might become His power (or the instrument of His power) to your salvation, could you think it concerned you not to sue and supplicate to Him for that grace, when your life lay upon it, and your eternal hope?” “Have you lay weltering (wallowing) at the footstool of the throne of grace in in your own tears (as you were formerly weltering in your sins and impurities), crying for grace to help you in this time of your need?” “And if you think this was above you and outside your compass, have you done all that was within your compass in order to the obtaining of grace at God’s hands?” “But here perhaps, you will inquire: Is there anything, then to be done by us, whereupon the grace of God may be expected certainly to follow?” “To which I answer:

1st – That it is out of the question that nothing can be done by us to deserve it, or for which we may expect it to follow.” “It were not grace if we had obliged, or brought it, by our desert,(that is – if we had done something to try to merit His favor) or under former preventive bonds to us.”(that is - if we thought that it was our obligation to keep ourselves from sin and to establish ourselves in righteousness) “And –

2nd – “What if nothing can be done by us upon which it (our obtaining salvation) may be certainly expected to follow?” “Is a certainty of perishing better than a high probability of being saved?”

3rd – “Such as live under the gospel have reason to apprehend it highly probable that they may obtain that grace which is necessary to their salvation, if they be not wanting to themselves.” (that is – acting irresponsibly and neglecting to consider and believe the gospel) “For,

4th – “There is generally afforded to such, that which is wont to be called common grace.” “I speak not of any further extent of it, ‘tis enough to our present purpose that it extends so far, as to them that live under the gospel, and have thereby a day allowed them wherein to provide for their peace.” “Now, though this grace is not yet certainly saving, yet it tends to that which is so.” “And none have cause to despair, but that being duly improved and complied with, it may end in it. – Taken from His treatise on Luke 19: 41 and 42 – “The Redeemer’s Tears Wept over Lost Souls”.

Howe is saying that God expects the sinner to consider and think about the common grace that He has extended to him in the sincere demonstration of His good will towards him, which is shown toward him in the gospel being preached to him. His inability to do this, to respond to this sincere offer, and his hostility to the thought that he needs to trust in Christ and not in himself to obtain God’s favor, only proves that salvation comes from nothing in ourselves, but is due only to the special grace of God which is given in regeneration.

**W.G.T. Shedd says:** “The Lord Jesus unquestionably desired that the inhabitants of Jerusalem would yield to that degree of common grace with which they had been blest, and would repent and believe on him ; and he unquestionably could have exerted upon them that degree of uncommon grace, by which he is “the author and finisher of faith”, Heb. 12 : 2; and by which he demonstrates that “all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth,” Matt. 28: 18. Yet he did not exert his power to overcome the obstinacy and resistance of the human will in this

instance. Those inhabitants of Jerusalem over whom he had wept were passed by in the bestowment of regenerating grace, but not of common.” P. 453 of Vol. 1 of Shedd’s Dogmatic Theology

**W.G.T. Shedd says in respect of Common Grace and Special grace:** “The reprobate resist and nullify common grace; and so do the elect.” “The obstinate selfishness and enmity of the human heart defeats the Divine mercy as shown in the ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit, in both the elect and non-elect.” “Acts 7: 51 – “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.” “The difference between the two cases is that in the instance of the elect, God follows up the common grace which has been resisted, with the regenerating grace which overcomes the resistance; while in the instance of the reprobate, he does not.” “It is in respect to the bestowment of this higher degree of grace, that St. Paul affirms that God “hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth”[i.e. does not soften].

“It is,” says William Bates (Eternal Judgment, II.), “from the perverseness of the will and the love of sin, that men do not obey the gospel. For the Holy Spirit never withdraws His gracious assistance, till resisted, grieved, and quenched by them. It will be no excuse, that Divine grace is not conferred in the same eminent degree upon some as upon others that are converted; for the impenitent shall not be condemned for want of that singular powerful grace that was the privilege of the elect, but for receiving in vain that measure of common grace that they had. If he that received one talent had faithfully improved it, he had been rewarded with more; but upon the slothful and ungrateful neglect of his duty, he was justly deprived of it, and cast into a dungeon of horror, the emblem of hell.” P. 432, 433 Vol. 1 of Shedd’s Dogmatic Theology

Luke 19: 11-27 – The Parable of the Minas –

Luke 19: 20 – “Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief.

Luke 19:21 For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.'

Luke 19:22 And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow.

Luke 19:23 Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?'

Luke 19:24 "And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.'

Luke 19:25 (But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.')

Luke 19:26 'For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

Luke 19:27 But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.' "

Matthew 25: 14-30 – The Parable of the Talents –

Matthew 25: 29 – “For to everyone who has, (that is special grace) more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has (that is common grace)

will be taken away.” “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness.” “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Shedd goes on to say: “Reprobated persons are striven with by the Holy Spirit, and are convicted of sin, but they resist these strivings, and the Holy Spirit proceeds no further with them. In his sovereignty, he decides not to overcome their resistance of common grace. The non-elect are the subjects of common grace, to which they oppose a strenuous and successful determination of their own will. Every sinner is stronger than common grace, but not stronger than regenerating grace. The non-elect “may be and often are outwardly called by the ministry of the word, and have some common operations of the Spirit, who for their willful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.” Westminster S. C., 68. Isa. 6 : 9, 10, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed.” The resistance and abuse of common grace is followed by desertion of God; which negative desertion is, in this passage of the evangelical prophet, called, Hebraistically, a positive stupefying, hardening and deafening.” P. 435 of Vol. 1 of Shedd’s Dogmatic Theology