***The Common Grace of God - Jude 1

JD03-02***

We are studying the book of Jude. Just to identify where we were again, we had been in the very first verse where we read that Jude who was a servant of Jesus, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the brother of James, "To them that are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called."

**Election**

We have been examining that last word "called," and we have looked at the doctrine of election. Election is the sovereign act of God in choosing for salvation in Christ Jesus those whom God has predestined according to his own purpose and according to his own good pleasure. There were certain keywords relative to the doctrine of election that we have gone over. We will review them for a moment.

There was first the word "election." This means to select one from among a number. The word "election" stresses the process by which God expressed His love toward those who were destined for salvation. The process of God expressing his love is election. Then we had the word "predestination" which is synonymous with the word "foreordination." Predestination means to mark out beforehand from a group for a special purpose. This word stresses the aim of the relationship which we enter with God who chooses us for eternal life. The aim of that relationship is for us to be converted into the image of Jesus Christ. A third word was "foreknowledge." Foreknowledge means to know one in an intimate way. It stresses the nature of the relationship which we enter with God as the elect. Foreknowledge does not mean to know something beforehand. In its scriptural meaning, it means to know one in an intimate relationship. A fourth word was "purpose." This word refers to all that God does in election, in predestination, and in foreknowledge. It stresses the plan of God's program.

Election is based on the sovereign good pleasure of God, but the disorientation of our old sin natures leads us to object to this doctrine. We went over a series of objections to the doctrine of election, and ultimately pointed out the fact that it's not a matter of justice. When it comes to justice, the only thing we deserve is eternity in hell. God in His grace has made a choice based upon some factor motivating his own being, but in a way perfectly compatible with His being and with what constitutes His essence. He has decided to choose some among the mass of us who are all headed for hell. He is not unjust in choosing by his own sovereign purpose certain ones to eternal life.

**The Doctrine of Common Grace**

Now the old sin nature disorients this and seeks to accuse God of being unfair and so on. We went over that in detail. Election does raise another doctrine that we do want to look at now, and that's a doctrine which is called the doctrine of common grace. The idea is that there are some people who are really good people. There is some good in the world, and this deserves to be recognized. There are some who, because of their good, perhaps do deserve to be saved, or they can move to salvation. There are some on primitive heathen fields who never hear the name of Christ who have a certain goodness that God will recognize and accept and receive them into eternal life on that basis.

So we're going to look at the nature of common grace. There is another grace which is special grace. We will look at special grace in the future. It is a different kind of grace, and it does indeed lead to eternal life. However, there is a common grace upon humanity. The problem of human good is simply this:

How is it that non-Christians who are very good people are not going to heaven, while you know a lot of Christians who are outright finks who are going to heaven? What about those good people who are going to miss it? Why is there an orderly life in our society, and in most societies and most civilizations? There is an orderly way of life in spite of the fact that all of creation and all of humanity are under the curse of God? Yet, in spite of being under the curse of God, there is this good orderly way of life that surrounds most human beings. What causes a non-Christian to be religious or to be moral? What causes a non-Christian to be moral? I've heard non-Christians say, "Because I am a moral person, I can't do this and this and this." What causes people who are unbelievers to have certain hard standards of morality that they will not deviate from? What makes the heathen reach out for a supreme being? How much good and credit does he deserve for reaching out for him?

**Pelagius**

Well, the problem of human goodness was raised early in the history of the Christian church by a British monk named Pelagius. Pelagius preached in Rome at the beginning of the fifth century, about the years 401 - 409 A.D., and he was a very popular preacher. However, Pelagius held some very definite non-scriptural ideas. Among the things he taught was that he rejected the idea of original sin--that there was no such thing as original sin in the Garden of Eden, and that man does not suffer the consequences of that original sin in the way of an old sin nature. He did not believe that man needed the power of God within him to obey God. In effect, he had no necessity for regeneration. Man was not suffering from an old sin nature because of the original sin of Eden. He did not need the power of God to respond and to obey God. There was something in man that was ready to respond to God.

This was the point that Pelagius was making. He didn't believe that the fall had affected the will of man. He didn't believe that man was not able to move toward God. The Scripture says, "There is none that seeks after God--no, not one." So when you and I stand in church and we sing that hymn "I Found Him, O, I Found Him," just remember that you weren't looking for Him when you found Him. It was He who found us. Pelagius said, "No, the will of man was not affected in the fall." He believed that human nature had the power to do good, and there's a certain truth in that--a certain type of good. The essence of Pelagianism was that man can please God by virtue of his own efforts--that there is capacity in man to please God.

Now this is a natural line of thinking for unsaved people who don't have the guidance of the Word of God. For example, God commands a man to be good. So some people say, "Now why would God command us to be good if we don't have any capacity to be good." Most sociologists work from this frame of reference as they analyze human affairs. They are Pelagian in their viewpoints. Most commentators, along with the sociologists, are Pelagian in their viewpoints. What you will discover as you listen to analysts, commentators, and sociologists is that they are forever holding out to us the encouraging hope that where things are bad, they're going to get better. We are forever being encouraged that this bad situation has this hopeful light here, this hopeful light here, and this hopeful light here. The Democrats are running around creating all kinds of hopeful light now, following their convention--that it's not going to be all that bad after all. Man is able to improve. Why? Because of the Pelagian idea that there is a certain basic goodness in man, and man is rising up forever to reach out for that goodness, and one day he's going to get it.

**Augustine**

Therefore, the Pelagian answer to the reason why there is human good in the non-Christian is that everybody has a good streak. However along came Augustine also in the early church, one of the church fathers, and he also spoke on the subject of human good. The church declared Pelagius a heretic--his views as contrary to the Word of God, which they were. And Augustine declared that which was in truth the scriptural point of view. Augustine taught that man is totally unable to do good. The expression we use theologically for this is that man is totally depraved. All of the virtues of a non-Christian good man are in reality sin. The good works originate from his old sin nature. They are motivated by self-glory, and not for the glory of God, as are our good works which are motivated by the Holy Spirit. Human good from the old sin nature is always rejected by God. Isaiah 64:6 talks about our righteousnesses. God says that all of your human good (that's what he means by righteousnesses) are filthy rags in God's sight. They are motivated by self-love.

Now, totally privately that Augustine spoke of does not mean that a person who is not a Christian cannot do anything that is good. It is simply declaring that every good thing he does is tainted by the old sin nature which motivates that good thing which he is doing. During the Reformation, the doctrine of common grace was developed. It was obvious, as you look out among society, that people do good things. You look out among people who are unbelievers, and they do good things.

So, putting together what Scripture taught relative to the condition of man's nature as total depravity, it was evident that there was an act of God in His grace that was moving upon human hearts that created a certain good among humanity. This is what we mean by the doctrine of common grace. Scripture shows that God provides certain blessings for the saved and the unsaved alike. Man of himself can do no good. However, what good he does do stems from this quality of the moving of the common grace of God. Common grace is a great benefit to humanity. It curbs sin, for one thing. It maintains moral order in the universe. It maintains restraint. The common grace of God is the motivating force behind the good things that are upon humanity.

So let's look at the meaning a little more. When we say common grace, we're referring to the ordinary things. That's what we mean by common. Common means the ordinary things that God does for all humanity. However, while this grace is a blessing in ordinary things, it does not bring eternal life. You must understand that. When we speak about common grace, it will not lead a person to eternal life. There is a special grace, an efficacious grace, that when God moves upon an unbeliever's heart, he moves toward salvation, and he will never fail to move toward salvation. Common grace does not move a person toward eternal life.

**The Blessings of Common Grace**

Common grace blessings are primarily in three areas. First, there are the general blessings of God to all creatures. It is God who supplies food, drink, clothing, and shelter so that creatures, human and animal, can survive. That's the common grace of God.

There is a general moral influence which is apart from any regenerating influence. However, this general moral influence, again, is a common blessing, a grace of God, and that is in areas like curbing sin. God the Holy Spirit restrains through the common grace of God the expression of sin. The promoting of order and the creating of civil righteousness are essential for national survival. A nation could not survive without the common grace of God which acts in the moral realm in behalf of humanity so that the earth's nature and its expressions are restrained.

And then there is the general encouragement by common grace of men toward redemption. It is the common grace of God that encourages a person toward redemption, but it won't carry him there. It won't necessarily carry him to eternal life. This is what John 16:7-8 is talking about, when Jesus said, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away. For if I don't go away, the comforter (that is, the Holy Spirit) will not come unto you. But if I depart, I will send Him unto you. When he has come, He will reprove (or convict) the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment." That's the common grace of God which is moving upon all men to reach out and move toward the supreme being that they are aware of from creation itself. It is the common grace of God that takes this ignorant spiritually darkened heathen and moves him to reach out for God.

**Marriage**

1 Corinthians 7:14 reflects another phase of common grace. That's the chapter on marriage. The question came up immediately in the New Testament church about two unsaved people. One of them becomes a Christian. That person asks, "Should I divorce my unsaved wife or husband." The answer was, "No." The reason for it: 1 Corinthians 7:14 says, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were your children unclean, but now they are holy." The word "sanctified" means "set apart." If you are an unbeliever and you happen to be married to a Christian, you are in a special common grace position because you are set apart to a special place of attention and blessing to God. If you are a mother and you are a Christian, but your husband is unsaved, your children are blessed and set apart to a common grace blessing of God because you are a Christian even though their father is not.

So God moves people through common grace toward spiritual decisions. This influence of God toward salvation doesn't mean that they are saved. It is sanctification that they are moved to. If you are in a family where there is a saint (and I don't mean a goody good--I mean somebody is born again), then you are sanctified, and the common grace of God rests upon you in a special way.

**Unbelievers**

The nature of common grace is not restricted to the elect. It's not only the elect who experience common grace, but the unsaved person also experiences the common grace of God. When we speak about special grace, that is for believers only. It leads to salvation. However, the unbeliever, because the common grace of God is upon him, may sometimes appear to prosper far in excess of the Christian. You know unbelievers who are blessed tremendously in what they do. They are prospered in every way. They are healthy, wealthy, and wise. They've got everything you could ask for. And here is some real dedicated Christian knocking out his brains for the Lord, and he doesn't have anything. The common grace of God is upon unbelievers, sometimes seemingly even in a way greater than upon believers.

Now this common grace does not remove the penalty, the guilt, or the contamination of sin as does the special grace of God. However, common grace is resistible. You can say, "No" to the moving of the common grace of God. You can reject the testimony simply by your own rebellion. Roman 1 tells how common grace has spoken through creation of the deity and the power of God. However, man rejected what common grace told him about that supreme being, and then he devolved into an animal level of worship.

**Creation**

So let's look at the bestowal of common grace. How does God bestow common grace? In what way does he bring this to us? For one thing, He brings it to us as we just referred to, through creation. So let's look at Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness." God in common grace has made a revelation of His righteousness against man's unrighteousness. Romans 1:19: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them. For God has shown it unto them. What may be known of God has been revealed to them." To whom? To unbelievers. There are certain things which we may know about God, and certain things have been revealed to unbelievers concerning God through creation alone.

Romans 1:20 explains that: "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead (or deity) so that they are without excuse." From creation certain conclusions can be reached about God whom we cannot see. There are certain things about God that we cannot see, but which we may know from creation. Unbelievers can learn of God's eternal power. There is someone out there who is tremendously almighty to be able to bring into being this kind of a creation. Furthermore, He is God. He is deity. So the heathen through the common grace of God comes to the awareness that God is out there. There is a supreme being out there, and He is all powerful.

Now common grace will not lead that heathen to salvation. He has to have more information, to begin with, concerning the person of Christ, and then the special efficacious grace of God has to come into play for him to cross the line into salvation. God has to work upon him as one of the elect and has to move his will to move toward God. This is why Pelagius was wrong. The will of man does not move toward God. There is nothing in us that would move us toward God. It takes a special work of God which he does perform upon the elect, and then we reach out for God. The unbeliever can grasp the reality of a supreme being from the reality of creation. Incidentally, "supreme being" is not a term that you find in the Bible, but you find it very commonly used among men. The reason people use it is because they get this concept from creation itself. That's where the concept of a supreme being came from--someone who is capable of producing all that is around us.

Romans 1:21-23 then describes what happens to people who reject this light (the heathen who goes negative toward the common grace revelation). Step-by-step, his unthankful heart will become darkened, and he will descend to the level of worshiping creeping things. He becomes bestial in his religious expression. So the rejection of God and of his eternal power and of his deity leads downward. God uses creation to express his common grace.

**Man's Moral Indicator**

Another thing he uses to express his common grace is the moral indicator which is in man. In Romans 2:14-15, Paul says, "For when the gentiles who have not the law (the standard of rights and wrongs) do by nature the things contained in the law, these not having the law are a law unto themselves (They have some kind of a moral indicator in them.), who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts alternatively accusing or else excusing one another." Within man, God in common grace has placed an awareness of rights and wrongs.

Now this indication of what is right and what is wrong may be very distorted because the person's mind may be so functioning (as the result of rejection of what he has been brought into) on human viewpoint, that his conscience cannot direct him to right actions. However, a Christian's conscience, which is on divine viewpoint, has signals that lead him to right conduct. But God, in his common grace, bestirs the moral indicators that are within every man, that he is aware that there are rights and wrongs. He may not know what those rights are and what those wrongs are. He may be very distorted as to what is right and what is wrong. But he is conscious that there is right and there is wrong, and this leads to the next step that, "I'm going to have to account to somebody for doing the wrong and for avoiding the right."

**Human Government**

Another expression of common grace is that God uses the restraint of human government. In Romans 13:1-4, human governments are presented as being ministers of God: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whoever, therefore, resists the power resists the ordinance of God. And they that resist shall receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Will you then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good and you shall have praise of the same. For he (governmental authorities) is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the minister of God, and avenger to execute wrath upon him that does evil."

So God uses laws and the enforcement of laws as his common grace to humanity. He gives governments and government leaders in his common grace to establish protection, care, and blessing for humanity. Government is God's minister. When you fight against the establishment, just remember that you are fighting against God's established order. God has set up establishments. He has set up governments. He has provided patterns for changing those governments commensurate with protecting liberty. This is what a person has a right to. A person has a right to his life. A person has a right to his personal liberty. And he has a right to his property.

Any government that denies either your life, your liberty, or your property is out of line with the divine order. You can't be given your life and then have your liberty denied. That's the crux of living. It is to be free. Nor can you have your personal property denied you. You cannot have liberty without private property. Private property and liberty are wedded together inexorably. There is no way around it. Any nation which does not have private ownership of property (which communist and socialistic nations do not have), does not have liberty in the sense in which God has given it to us. Now it is common grace that gives us this liberty. It is common grace of God that provides government with laws and the establishment of authority to protect that liberty and that blessing.

**The Fall of the Roman Empire**

I know you've heard this before but I want to again share with you something interesting about the Roman Empire. The historian Edward Gibbon wrote about the decline and the fall of the Roman Empire, this tremendous civilization that held the civilized world together for 500 years. The Roman Empire was magnificent; majestic; marvelously organized; and, it was marvelously productive of justice and of laws. However, the time came when the Roman Empire finally fell. And after all was said and done, Mr. Gibbon took note of the Roman Empire on the basis of all of his research; on the basis of what history has shown; and, on the basis of the progress of the Roman Empire. He asked, what caused this to happen? This was the common grace upon humanity through the Roman Empire. This is what the Roman society rejected of the common grace of God. This is what led to their national disaster. This is what he said:

1. **Excessive Spending**

One factor was excessive spending by the central government. Spending, spending, and more spending. Every year they spent more than the government was taking in.

1. **Unwillingness to Bear Arms**

Secondly, there was unwillingness of young men to bear arms in the defense of their country. The time came when the Pax Romana, the Roman peace that brooded upon the whole ancient world, began to come apart at the seams because young men were no longer willing to enter military duty and to perform military service on behalf of the country. This, again, is an order of God for the protection of a national entity.

1. **Overindulgence in Luxury**

Next was overindulgence in luxury. The whole Roman Empire became enamored with better chariots; better theater performances in the circus; better TV sets; bigger refrigerators; better vacations; and, right down the line. It was just luxury, luxury, and luxury. The Roman Empire became absorbed with it. They loved banquets, and they finally learned how to really have a banquet. They found the problem with every banquet. It's like when you go out to eat, what happens? After all of the appetizers and all of the knickknacks are brought out at the beginning, you get to the main steak and other stuff, and pretty soon you can't eat any more. And there is all of that beautiful stuff sitting there.

The Romans used to say, "Gee, we love these banquets. This is one of the nicest things we do. And here it is. We take 30 minutes, and we're stuffed, and that's the end of the banquet, and we have the whole evening to sit around and do nothing. In an age of luxury, they discovered how to solve that. So they created pits, some of them very ornate, out behind in the patios, where after a certain stage of your banquet, you could go back there and get rid of that first five or six courses, and come back and start all over again. Consequently, the banquets went on for hours. After you got to a certain point, you could start all over again by the process of visiting the pit. Now that's luxury. I mean that was real living.

And I know that you are going to think that I'm talking about the United States of America, and I can understand your thinking, but I'm not. I remind you that I'm talking about the ancient Roman Empire that went down centuries ago.

1. **Sexual Immorality and Easy Divorce**

Next was widespread sexual immorality and easy divorce which destroyed the integrity of family life. This used to be a strong point in the Roman Empire. Family life was a cornerstone, as it is of every society. In time, divorce was nothing, and sexual immorality was nothing in the empire. It was shattering. Pornography began to run rampant and wild where it was once restrained. You can go to Rome and you can visit the ruins, and the pornography is all over the walls and in the baths. They're rampant with it.

Now this was a way of life of a society. And when that happens, it doesn't seem like much. It seems like: Oh, it's a kind of a relaxed different age. But what is happening is that the nation is beginning to come apart at the seams so that in times of crises it can never again pull itself together. When the Roman Empire was finally faced with the threat of the barbarian hordes and tribes from the north that came down upon the empire, it could not pull itself together. Its sexual immorality was part of the reason. It destroyed the fiber of the nation and its will to resist.

1. **Effeminacy**

Next was the spread of effeminacy--girls looking and acting like men, and men looking and acting like girls. This included homosexuality and the appearance of long hair on men. The Roman Empire became saturated with long-haired men who were assuming the unisex look, and assuming the appearance of women. This was a degenerative step downward that was a major mark of the nation's imminent disastrous downfall.

1. **Religion**

And finally there was the disregard of religion, where they were willing to slaughter Christians for being unwilling to worship the emperor. Religion was a big thing where they called the Christians atheists. It was no longer any problem to them to ignore religion.

Now that was Rome 1,400 years ago, and that was the common grace of God that Rome was rejecting. These specifics were the specific ways in which they rejected the common grace of God that led to its destruction.

God uses the restraint of human government. Incidentally, even a bad government is better than anarchy. Even a bad establishment is better than anarchy.

**Public Opinion**

God also perhaps uses public opinion. Some of these factors that we've mentioned previously come together, and God uses them. Often people are moved in the direction of morality and righteousness by sheer public opinion. Now, you can tell this in clothing. If women's dresses are of a modest cut, style, and length, there is a public opinion that is set, and everybody moves toward it. When it moves toward immodesty, all of them move like a herd in the same way, and suffer under the awkward immodesty of the cut of the dresses. God can move public opinion in His common grace to the blessing and the preservation of a people.

**Punishment and Reward**

God uses human awareness of punishment and reward. There is something in man that the common grace of God stresses the awareness that there is going to be punishment, and there is reward. Now you have this partly in creation. You see certain contrasts. You look upon creation and there is vast beauty, but you also see vast decay. You have blessing, and you have cursing. You have the forces of nature. These same forces which bring blessing can also bring cursing.

A light spring rain can also be a torrential flood. It can bring blessing. It can bring trial. There are predators among animals. Animals which are splendid beautiful species are cut down by predators. There is a sense of judgment. There is a blessing and a punishment in the animal world itself. A mountain that can be a majestic sight can also erupt into a torrent of the flowing of lava. Water can be a pleasure, but it can also be a destructive force. Among humanity, there are benefactors, and there are tyrants. It is innate in the human heart to look upon benefactors and expect there to be blessing upon them, and to receive them as the blessing of God, and to look upon tyrants as being under the curse of God.

So there are certain results that come from the common grace of God. This is a theological expression, and it is an explanation for the good that you see among people. The good that we are ready to attribute to human beings, and say, "You see, there is something good in man. Pelagius was right. There is something in our old sin nature by which we can approach God that God will accept. There is something unfair about our good neighbors here who are fine moral people yet destined for hell because they reject Christ as Savior. There is something unfair about this heathen who never hears about Christ but who has rejected the revelation of the supreme being through creation that he should be condemned. Any good that is in our society; any virtue; and, any values that stand are because the common grace of God is moving us to that good.

So here are some things that result: The common grace of God certainly postpones the divine wrath, giving time for repentance. Sin is restrained by God the Holy Spirit so that our society enjoys an orderly way of life. The unbelievers possess a sense of morality, and the guides such as we find in the Ten Commandments are guides of morality. This is the result of the common grace of God so that even unbelievers are under that moral standard. There is the performance of civil righteousness and of human good tainted by the old sin nature and rejected by God. Nevertheless, there is the common grace of God that moves toward a civil righteousness that a nation needs for survival. There are the natural blessings of life which are upon all men that God showers equally. Some things are true of all men because of the common grace of God.

Everybody knows God is a supreme being. There never was a person that ever lived who came to an age of awareness that didn't know that there was a supreme being. There is not a breathing mature human being in the world today in the most primitive darkened place on the face of the earth who does not know that there is a supreme being. The common grace of God makes that clear to him. All are aware of the supreme power of God. There is nobody on the face of the earth tonight who does not know the tremendous power of that supreme being from creation alone. They have a fear of that supreme being. They have a sense of judgment to be faced by that supreme being. There is not a person on the face of the earth tonight who is not aware of the fact that this powerful tremendous supreme deity that exists out there is one that he will be confronting in judgment. He tries in one way or another to prepare for that judgment. Either he reaches out with a positive response or he rejects what he sees. Everyone because of the common grace of God grasps a certain standard of moral values. It is this that creates the good which we see in our society.

So don't be carried away and disturbed when somebody says, "These good people should be rewarded. They deserve eternal life. They deserve to be considered by God." Anything that is good and beneficial and blessing in our society is the result of the common grace of God. What comes out of our old sin natures is not acceptable to God. The blessings that God moves upon us, He moves upon believer and unbeliever alike. They are from Him, and they are not from our old sin natures. They are not to be accredited or attributed to us. They are the results of God's grace moving upon us. This common grace will never move you to eternal life. It will simply move you to the place where there is blessing and preservation for society. It's a doctrine that you have to associate with the doctrine of election.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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