



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“The Holy Spirit in the World, *or* Common and Efficacious Grace” TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the opportunity of again looking into the Holy Scriptures. We thank Thee that they are the word of God. And we thank Thee for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and how he moved holy men of God to give us the record of the revelation which Thou hast given to us, not only in creation about us, and in conscience and in history; but especially in the special revelation concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And we thank Thee, Lord, that we have in our hands the pointer to that which is able to save our souls, the finished work of Jesus Christ. And tonight, as we consider the ministry of the Holy Spirit in connection with man's salvation, give us understanding; the ability to see the things that Thou wouldst have us to see in spiritual things and build us up in our faith. We commit each one present here tonight to Thee for spiritual blessing upon them.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject tonight is The Holy Spirit in the World, *or* Common and Efficacious Grace. Last year, when we were talking about the work of Christ in salvation, we considered common grace and efficacious grace on separate nights. And those of you

who were here then, will recognize that we are covering something of the same ground. But there are, of course, some in the audience who were not here then and to treat the work of the Holy Spirit without reference to the work of the Spirit in common and efficacious grace, would be to omit something that is exceedingly important in the ministry of the Spirit. And so tonight we are going to go over those doctrines again particularly as they refer to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Golden Wheeler told me yesterday of a conversation that Marge had with a friend about a mutual friend who had recently died. And I noticed Marge is in the audience, and I really ought to call her up here to tell the story but since we don’t allow women to speak in the church, I’m going to tell the story. And Marge, I hope that I’m going to tell it accurately. And if I don’t, I’m sure it’s because Golden didn’t tell it to me accurately.

But at any rate, Marge commented on the death of this friend of hers and she concluded some words that she was saying to her friends with, “It’s so sad since he was lost.” And her friend was a little disturbed by that, upset by it or puzzled by it and said, “Well, what do you mean? Wasn’t he a Christian?” Marge said, “No, he was a Christian Scientist.” And her friend expressed a little question over whether a Christian Scientist was a Christian. And as Golden told it to me, I think, Marge explained how a Christian Scientist is not a Christian. And then as the conversation continued, her friend offered a statement that she had, as a matter of fact, just learned that a Unitarian was not a Christian, but at least, and she referred again to the man who had died, At least, he went to church.

And Marge took that as an opportunity to explain that, though we go to church, if we have not put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, going to church will not enable us to possess eternal life. And finally, her friend said, “But he was such a good man.”

And all of us, I am sure, have been brought to that place when we are thinking about Christianity where people will finally say, “But he was such a good man.” And I

think that many Christians have a little bit of difficulty in fielding that kind of a statement. They do not know exactly how to respond to it. “He was such a good man.”

And so the problem of the goodness of the natural man is something that touches us particularly in our witnessing that we do concerning our faith. It’s a very practical problem but essentially, it is a theological problem. And it’s related to these.

Why are many non-Christians good men? Now, in the first place, we should say in answer to that when we use the term “good men” we are using a human standard.

I am sure that if we were able to look at men from the standpoint of God, we would not say that anyone outside of Christ was a good man. But then, we have a limited perspective. We look at a man and we notice that his family life seems to be exemplary, although we are not in the household when no one else is around. We see his children and they seem to be well behaved, and he seems to be a good father. Further, so far as we can tell in the community he seems to be living the kind of life that the community would say was a good life. Again, of course, we do not know what is within the man’s heart. He may even be the kind of man who is known as a philanthropist in his community and because of his large gifts, he has his name on some important buildings in the city. Or, in other ways, is a man whom the average person would consider to be an ideal citizen.

And, again, we are unable to look into that man’s heart and we cannot tell, of course, the motivations that have led him to live the kind of life that he has lived.

But we do have some words in God’s word that concern all men and if we read these words and if we believe the words of God, then it does pose something of a problem to us because in the Bible we seem to have a different view of men than men often have of men.

For example, the Apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God says,

“There is none righteous; no, not one. There is none that understandeth. There is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way. They are together become unprofitable. There is none that doeth good; no, not one.”

And so we really have in the Bible a direct contradiction of the statement, “He was such a good man.” The Bible says, “There is none good; no, not one.” And so we must conclude that when we use the statement “good man” we are measuring it by a human standard.

Now, a human standard is far below the divine standard. What God considers to be a good man is not the same as the world considers a good man. What God considers to be a good man is a man who is possessed of the righteousness of God through the saving work of Jesus Christ and who, in some measure, lives to the glory of God.

It’s entirely possible for us to be an outstanding citizen in the community and yet know nothing of God and further, to be deep down in our hearts the greatest of sinners. For, you see, all of our good may arise out of motives of selfishness, desire for self-acclaim, desire for approval, desire for praise. And from the standpoint of the Bible, the good work that a person does in order to glorify himself are not good works at all, for they are essentially opposed to the glory of God.

Now, a Christian is a man who has, by the grace of God, come to recognize that within himself there is nothing by which he can commend himself to God and he has put his trust in Jesus Christ. And he recognizes that all of the real good that flows from his life is the product of God himself. And consequently, whatever good is done, is good that rebounds to the glory of God; not to the glory of man.

Now, I think we can also answer this question in another way. We can, at least from the standpoint of the Bible, discern that there are certain blessings that God does give to all men. And I am sure that, were it not for certain blessings that God gives to men, the blessing of common grace, all of us would be like animals in a jungle. And

whatever we see that even is outwardly good, that measures up to a human standard, far below the divine, but nevertheless a human standard of good, even that is the product of the common grace of God.

Another question in connection with this is not only, why are many non-Christians good men, but why are non-Christians religious? And the answer, again, is due to the common grace of God.

Or looking at it from the standpoint of the community, what is it that really accounts for the orderly life of a world under the curse? What accounts for the fact that we do have government? Government may be weakening now, but we have government. We have order in human society. We have outbreaks of chaos but we have essentially order. What accounts for that? As far as I can tell from the study of the word of God, if there were no restraints imposed by human government, which is given by God, men would be just like animals in a jungle. And we would be in utter chaos. And the strong would survive and the weak would die. And so again, we come to this, so far as the Bible is concerned, this question of the grace of God that issues, in a common way, to all men.

Now, there is another problem that we face. And sometimes we do not really face it as we should. And that is, how can a dead man be saved?

Now, as you can see, I’m not speaking about a man who is dead physically. Paul, in Ephesians chapter 1, says,

“And you, who were dead in trespasses and sin, hath he quickened.”

Now, how is it possible for us to quicken a man who is dead? How is it possible for us to bring to life a dead man? Or the question may be put in this way, how is the man brought to Christ for salvation? Or to put it in the human way, as we often like to put it, non-theologically, how do we come to Christ for salvation?

Now, many answers have been given to this difficult question. The Pelagian view -- and I wrote Pelagian up there for some of you up there who may be new and haven’t heard that term. The rest of you have heard it many times.

The Pelagian view is that, “I came by myself. I am not really lost. I can come to God by my own strength, and I can obtain my salvation by my good works.”

And so the Pelagian answer is, I came by myself. They deny grace altogether. The first Pelagian in the Bible was Adam, for in the Garden of Eden, after Adam sinned and fell, he sewed fig leaves together and the two of them, Adam and his wife, came into the presence of God wearing the covering which they had provided. That was just a little picture; that was just a little parable representation of man’s attempt to clothe himself in the presence of God. It was Adam’s way of making himself suitable for God’s presence. And you know the story after God has pronounced judgment upon them for their sin and has told them the consequences of it, he then slew an animal, took the skins of the animals, and made for Adam and Eve coats of skins to cover them. Now, that too was a little parable in pictures of how the animal’s death, suggesting the coming of the Lamb of God. The skin of the animal with which he clothed them suggesting the righteousness of Jesus Christ, for it was the covering that the animal possessed. It was also a way of saying to them that the fig leaves were unacceptable to God and that he wouldn’t have any clothing that man had provided.

And you can be sure of this. Now, if you happen to be in this audience tonight and you have not yet come to know what it is to possess a righteousness that avails before God, if you attempt to enter into the presence of God with your righteousness, you are going to be sadly -- very sad and sadly mistaken about the response of God to that, for he says that unless we possess the righteousness of God, we shall not stand in his presence.

Now, the Pelagian, Adam and the rest, said I can come by myself. Every man who thinks that he can be saved by his own good works is a follower of Adam the first, and the many disciples that he has had since that time.

The semi-Pelagian is a man who is not so bold as to say that he can come by himself but he says in effect, I wanted to come and God helped me. In other words, he denies any prevenient grace, any grace given by God before he comes, but he admits cooperative grace, if man first exercises human volition. In other words, the semi-Pelagian says, if man responds by willing to come, then God gives him cooperative grace and he comes. And so his answer to the problem of how do we come to Christ for salvation is: I wanted to come. I willed to come. I exercised positive volition, and God helped me.

Now, I think you can see that, if that is true, then some men have something that other men do not have. If that’s all there is to it, then some men have the will to come, some men do not have the will to come. And in essence, we might ultimately say, “The reason I’m saved is because I had the will to come.” You did not have the will to come.

And so I am not only saved by God but also by my will to come.

The Arminian is a little more Scriptural. Arminians, by the way, are not in any one denomination or any one group, nor are semi-Pelagians, for that matter. You will find semi-Pelagians, unfortunately, even among the Presbyterians. And that causes John Calvin a great deal of discomfort at the present time because that is the one doctrine that he was especially adamant against while he was here on the earth. And now that he’s in heaven and sees even clearer, I’m sure that they are in heaven disturbed over any way in which we veer from the truth.

Now, Arminians are generally associated with churches such as the Methodist church, but fortunately, not all Methodists are Arminians. I have even run across a few Calvinistic Methodists, and that is comforting. [Laughter]

But the Arminians believe that the answer to the question, “How do we come to Christ for salvation” is God gave me sufficient grace to come, because Christ died and I cooperated. God gave me sufficient grace to come. They believe in prevenient grace, and they cooperated with it. Now, he admits total depravity, and he admits that God gives sufficient grace, but that sufficient grace becomes efficient when we cooperate.

Now, I think, again, you can see that if our salvation really depends upon our cooperation then some cooperate and some don’t. Some men are lost because they do not cooperate. Some men are saved because they do cooperate. And whatever it is that makes a man cooperate, assuming it does not come from God, it must be in that man and if it’s in that man then that is the ultimate cause of his salvation. And so in the final analysis, his salvation comes depends, to some extent, upon what is in himself.

Now, the Lutherans saw more clearly than the Arminians, and they said the answer to the question, “How do we come to Christ for salvation?” is God brought me, and I did not resist. It was God who brought me to Christ. It was God who gave prevenient grace. And as he gave me this prevenient grace, it is not that I cooperated, as an Arminian might say positively, but I did not resist. And because I did not resist, prevenient grace brought me to Christ. And so I can say, God saved me, and I did not resist the grace that he showed me. Now, he refuses to admit, the Lutheran, that the reason unbelievers are not quickened is due to sovereign withholding of efficacious grace. He says that the reason men are lost is because they resist grace.

Now, again, I would like to ask: now, if that is true; if God gives us prevenient grace and if he brings us to God and we do not resist, well then here is a person who does resist. And here is another who does not resist. And the man who does not resist is saved. The man who does resist is lost.

Well, what is there in a man that makes him resist? For, you see, there is something in the man who has resisted that makes him resist. And so therefore, in the final analysis, there must be something in the man who does not resist that is not in the

man that does resist. There is a difference, essentially, in the men. And so the man who does not resist cannot only glorify God because He brought him, but also because he did not resist. There is something within him that causes him not to resist.

Now, I think, again, you can see, whatever we call it, we’re always getting back to the same thing. Is salvation wholly a work of God, or is it almost all God and something of ourselves?

Now, the Calvinists’ view is that God brought me to Christ. That’s it. God brought me to Christ. As a matter of fact, he brought me to Christ over my resistance. He brought me to Christ over my failure to cooperate. He brought me to Christ over all of the things that I wanted to do to keep from coming. But the love of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit’s work, so overmastered me that over my former rebellion against God, I was brought to Christ. And if you ask a Calvinist why he is saved, he will say, “God saved me.” He will not say, “I came of myself.” He will not say, “I wanted to come and God helped me.” Unless he also adds, “It was God who made me want to come.” He will not say, “God gave me sufficient grace to come because Christ died and I cooperated,” without adding that, “my cooperation was a previous work of God.” He will not say that, God gave -- He will not say that, “I wanted to come. I had the will to come and God brought me to Christ,” without saying, “It was God who made me willing to come.”

And so in the final analysis, he will trace it entirely to God. In fact, he will stress the fact that he was in rebellion against God. He will stress his blindness. He will stress his deadness. He will stress his deafness. He will stress the fact that he was running away from God, but that God has brought him to Christ.

You know, the Apostle is very sensitive about this, and you can even catch him making this point in statements that he makes about the salvation of men; such as the one in Galatians 4 in verse 9, where he says, “But now, after that ye, [speaking to the Galatians] But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God.”

In other words, he feels a little unhappy about putting that you know God, positively without reminding them that the reason they have come to know God is because he has first put his hand upon them and entered into that relationship of knowledge of them. Or are known” changes it to the passive.

James Packer is one of our better-known theologians and also one of our better theologians, and he has commented on the difference between the Arminians and the Calvinists in this way. He says, quote, “One makes salvation depend on the work of God; the other, on the work of man. One regards faith as a part of God’s gift of salvation; the other, on man’s own contribution to salvation. One gives all the glory of saving believers to God; the other, divides the praise between God who, so to speak, built the machinery of salvation, and man who, by believing, operated it.”

So these questions, they are tremendously important in our understanding of the grace of God. That’s why we preach that salvation is by grace. Now, there are a lot of people talking about grace that are not really preaching grace. For, when a man preaches that salvation is by God through Jesus Christ if you exercise your will and does not hasten to say it is God who causes our wills to be turned toward God, that man is really not preaching grace. He may call it grace, but it’s not grace. Because grace is totally free. It is totally the work of God.

As I have said before to you, when man’s will responds to the gospel of salvation, it is because God has first worked in that will. Dr. Barnhouse used to like to put it; “If we respond in our wills to God, it is because, first, God has tickled our will-er.” [Laughter]

Now, we’re going to try to take these two questions, why are some men good men or why do they appear to be good men, and the second, how do we come to Christ, and relate them to the work of the Holy Spirit, tonight. And so, Roman I, the nature, means and fruit of common grace.

And my outline is very simple. I hope you think it’s logical because what we’re doing is just taking these three words, nature, means, and fruit, under each of the titles, common grace and efficacious grace, and seeking to explain them.

Capital A, the nature of common grace. Now, common grace is called common because it is given to all -- it is not called common because it is given to all men, but common because it produces ordinary effects and may fall short of saving efficacy.

Now, of course, every man who is the recipient of efficacious grace and is brought to God through Christ is also the recipient of common grace. But there are men who are the recipient of common grace who do not come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, the nature of common grace -- I think we can set up three categories that will explain most of the aspects of common grace. First of all, common grace includes general blessings to all creatures, even animals, such as food, drink, clothing, shelter, according to the good pleasure of God. In other words, all of the blessings that come to us in a material way are ultimately the blessings that God gives us. They are the products of his hand. And so these general blessings to all of God’s creatures fall within the realm of common grace.

And then, secondly, there are the general operations of the Spirit by which he, without renewing the heart, exercises moral influence among men. For example, God, through the Holy Spirit, curbs sin in the world in which we live. He promotes order. He promotes civil righteousness. He has given us government. And through government there is restraint of sin. The Holy Spirit himself restrains sin in the world. And this is a product of the common grace of God. It touches all men but it falls short of saving efficacy.

And we also, thirdly, might include the general operations of the Spirit by which he influences men toward redemption but does not secure it. For even in the lives of many who are not brought to faith in Christ, they are given promptings by God to come to him. They are given urgings. They are given privileges.

I want you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 7 in verse 14 on this particular point and we’re going to look at a text which has puzzled people but I think, if read correctly, will help us to understand one of the aspects of common grace. 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 14, and in this chapter, remember, we have a chapter on marriage and the relationship of the husband to the wife. And in the midst of it, Paul is answering a question about two people who were married, and one of them has become a believer. And since, in Israel, Israel was told not to marry unbelievers, the question arises since they were acquainted with that. Well, now that we’ve become a Christian, shall we put away our wife or husband as the case may be...

And Paul is saying, in verse 13:

“And the woman that hath a husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him, for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife.”

Now, you can see that doesn’t mean salvation. He’s an unbelieving husband, but he is sanctified by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.

“Else were your children unclean. But now are they holy.”

Now, why are children holy in a family in which, apparently, one person only is a Christian and the children? There is no evidence that Paul regards the children as being believers. We would presume they are unbelievers. But he calls them holy.

Well, now, of course, when we use the term “holy,” we must understand as we explained last year that the term “holy” does not necessarily mean that a person is intrinsically holy. It often means, simply, to set apart for some particular use. For example, I, you may remember, I turned you to passages in the Old Testament in which

prostitutes were called holy. Not holy because they were intrinsically holy, but holy because they were set apart by the heathen for a particular religious view.

For example, in ancient times, when the temples had hundreds of prostitutes attached to them and it was common in those days for the prostitutes to have intercourse with men; and this was part of their religion. Now, those prostitutes who were set apart for that kind of activity could be called holy. They could be called set apart just as if I were to take this volume here in my hand my Greek-Hebrew Old and New Testament, the inspired text, and I were to put it over there. I might say, “I have sanctified it.” That is, I have set it apart over here, and I want it to be left right there. That would be sanctified.

So the text, when it says the children are sanctified, does not mean they are saved. What it really means is that the child of a parent who is a believer has an advantage, a privilege that other children do not have. And so Paul tells the believing member of the family to remain with the other because he says, “Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.”

And so it is the influence of the believer that sets apart the unbelieving child. It’s a great privilege to grow up in a family in which both husband and wife are Christians. And it’s a privilege to grow up in a family in which one of them is Christian. And the children are holy, set apart. And so they have opportunities. They are the recipients of common grace. That’s one aspect of it.

Turn over to John chapter 16, verses 7 and 8. And here, our Lord, in the Upper Room Discourse, refers to another aspect of the Spirit’s work that does not bring men to Christ. John chapter 16 in verse 7, we read:

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth,” [our Lord is speaking in the Upper Room Discourse to the Disciples just before he goes away,] “It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you.” [Comforter is the Holy

Spirit.] “But if I depart I will send him unto you. And when he is come [the Comforter] he will reprove [or perhaps convict] he will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.”

Now, it should be obvious to us that the Holy Spirit does not convict the world of sin in the sense that the world comes to recognize its sin and then turns to Christ. But our Lord does promise that the Holy Spirit will carry on a ministry that will bring conviction to the hearts of many people throughout the world about their sin. They may not turn to the Lord, but they will be convicted of their sin.

Now, we were expounding in Acts chapter 18, just a Sunday or so ago, and you may remember that Apollos, after he had been straightened out by Priscilla, he then went into the synagogue -- or, he went over to Aquila, and he went into the synagogue and in Acts chapter 18 in verse 28, it says,

“For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.”

And that word “convinced” there is just a stronger word for the word that Jesus used. “Convict” the world of sin.

And so Apollos went into the synagogue and he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing that by the Scriptures Jesus was Christ. But they were not all converted. But they were brought under conviction. That was the common grace of the Holy Spirit, designed to influence men toward redemption.

And so the nature of common grace, then, falls into these categories of general blessings to all creatures in the physical realm, general operations of the Spirit in curbing sin throughout the world, promoting order in government, and the general operations of the Spirit by which he influences men toward redemption.

What are the means of common grace?

Now, the means of common grace, you probably can guess from what I have said are: the light of creation about us, not only the light of God that comes as we observe the creation from which we can know that God is all powerful, He is a supreme being, but the benefits of that creation; the benefits that come to us physically. Food, drink, rains, the seasons; all of these are the blessings of God.

It’s not often that you hear Christians thank God for things like this but they are part of his gracious activities toward men.

And then the means of common grace include human conscience. God has given us a conscience. It is a kind of monitor within men. Now, it may be silenced, it may be by our disobedience brought to the place where we can hardly feel or hear its voice within us. But it has been given to us in order to be a kind of monitor of our activities.

And he has given us human government. I’m going to ask you, if you will, quickly to turn with me to Romans chapter 1, verses 18 through 23, and I want you to see what Paul has to say about what creation may do for us. Romans chapter 1, verse 18, Paul writes:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth and unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. 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; so that they are without excuse.”

In other words, God has given us such a glorious revelation in his creation that men could discern, were they not fallen, that God has eternal power and divinity.

He goes on to say:

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.”

I think you can see that religious evolution is a myth and a fantasy. It is religious devolution that is the teaching of God’s word.

Now, will you turn to chapter 2 of Romans and listen as I read verses 14 and 15. Paul writes:

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts to mean while accusing or else excusing one another.”

And there is the light of the conscience. Turn over to chapter 13, verses 1 through 4, and here we are going to see what God says about human government. He says, chapter 13:

“Let ever soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

Now, that’s easy to see if we have a benevolent government, but it’s hard sometimes for us to see, when we see a Stalin installed in a place of supreme authority in

some country. But even in a country like Russia, there were some benefits even under that regime that came from human government. All of these things are perverted by men.

“Whosoever therefore,” [Paul says,] “resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves condemnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.”

In other words, that means if you pay your income tax that you should pay and keep the proper records when they check up on you, why the IRS examiner may say, “You know, I see you don’t owe us a thing and I want to commend you for the records that you keep.” [Laughter]

Verse 4, “for he is the minister of God to thee for good.”

Now, that means that President Nixon is a minister of God. You’re inclined to think of the minister as a man who stands in the pulpit and preaches on Sunday morning. Well, the man who is the mayor of Dallas, Eric Johnson, is a minister of God.

Men who are in places of authority in government are there by the ordinance of God. And they are ministers of God. That, by the way, is why it is very difficult for anyone to obtain any Biblical reason for revolting against the ordinances of human government.

Now, the means then of common grace are these and there are others. But let’s move on.

The fruit of common grace. What are the products of common grace? Well, one of the products of common grace is the postponement of the execution of wrath. When God put Adam and Eve in the garden, for example, he said, “In the day thou eatest

thereof, thou shalt surely die.” And we know that when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, they died, spiritually.

Now, God did not have to preserve their lives upon the earth. He might just as well have begun over again and said, well, it’s too bad, Adam and Eve. You’ve blown it, and we’re going to start over and there’s going to be a new Adam.

But we know from the revelation of God that while judgment was pronounced upon Adam and Eve, hundreds of years have elapsed. In fact, we are still living in the permission of God. And even at this present day, judgment is waiting to fall upon this human race, and it has not fallen.

It fell once at Calvary. And when God cried out -- God the Son cried out, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me,” we have some evidence of what the divine judgment shall be. But it has not fallen yet. Judgment is still in the future.

And the reason we have an opportunity to respond is common grace. The restraint of sin that we know about is common grace. It is possible even for men to resist the Holy Spirit, as Stephen concluded his message in the synagogue, remember, he said, “Why do ye and your fathers resist the Holy Ghost?” The Holy Ghost was pleading, was exercising influence toward them that was designed to influence them toward redemption and they resisted. That influence of the Spirit is part of his common grace. It’s the fruit of it.

Then the human sense of morality and spirituality. Why is it that we know there is such a thing as religious good? Why, these are the products, the fruit of common grace.

It’s surprising how many people, who are not Christians, who do not want to become a Christian, but nevertheless they approve of righteousness and goodness.

I still remember about eighteen years ago when the National Open Golf Tournament was held here in Dallas at the Northwood Country Club, and one of the amateurs playing in the tournament, a very fine amateur golfer from South Carolina, was a young man -- that’s as of eighteen years ago -- was a young man that I had played with.

In fact, I had stayed at his home many years ago when I used to play in golf tournaments in South Carolina. And I saw he was going to be in the tournament here, so I went out to follow him and followed him around. And we had a long conversation together on a couple of days, and he happened to know the eventual winner of the tournament very well, Judas Morris. And he began to tell me some of the things about Morris.

Well, I had already spoken to him about the things of Christ, and it was obvious he didn’t have any understanding of spiritual things and didn’t really have any desire to know anything about Jesus Christ. But it interested me the way in which he referred to Mr. Morris. He said, “You know, Lewis, he’s a very good man. And he’s a very religious man, too.” He was commending his goodness and commending his religious nature. But he, himself, was not a believer at all.

But you see he had been the recipient of common grace. That’s why my friend was able to express those value judgments. He was the recipient himself of a measure of common grace. And then, of course, all these natural blessings that we’ve talked about; they are the fruits of common grace too.

Now, let’s turn to the nature, means and fruits of efficacious grace. Common grace is exercised immediately by the truth, through conscience, government, upon all men. Efficacious grace is exercised immediately by the Holy Spirit, who uses the truth upon the elect. No one ever is the recipient of efficacious grace except the elect. So if you are here tonight, and you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, the reason that you have efficacious grace exercised towards you is because you belong to the elect. That’s why.

You know, the Bible distinguishes two calls which correspond to these two types of grace. There is “general” calling and “special” calling. General calling is the invitation that is issued to all. Special calling is the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing a man to Christ. Common grace is exercised toward all; efficacious, infallible grace is the grace that brings a man to Christ. The Bible recognizes this. For example, remember the text that says, “Many are called but few are chosen.” Many are invited but few belong to the elect.

Relatively, not that heaven is not going to be crowded. God has chosen many. But then, you remember the other text, in Romans, chapter 8, Paul says: “Whom he calls, them he justified.”

Well, then, wait a minute. Many are called, few are chosen. Them whom he called, them he justified. You see Paul is talking about two different callings. In one case it’s the general calling, “Many are called, few are chosen.” But the special calling, “Whom he calls” in that special way, them he justified. Every one of them, every single one of them, not one is lost. God knows all his saints.

Now, the nature of efficacious grace. We may say this about it. Efficacious grace is a divine influence that leads to an act, the act of salvation. It’s not a process. It is a divine influence that leads to a specific act. When a man becomes a Christian -- or a specific event, if we like to call it that.

Now, I’m going to ask you to turn to John chapter 6 in verse 24, first, although the Holy Spirit is not mentioned here, but this truth is here.

Now, you know, a lot of people seem to think that this doctrine of efficacious grace is a kind of doctrine that theologians have thought up. And they are somewhat suspicious of it because it introduces them to problems that they often are unable to solve. And we never like to have a problem we cannot solve, do we? We really don’t like to have anything of which we have to say, “Well, now, we may not be able to know that as long as we are in the flesh because it may be beyond our human intelligence.”

And so I want to show you that this is not simply a theologian’s opinion. This is the teaching of Jesus Christ himself. Listen, John 6, verse 44:

“No man can come to me” [did you notice that?] “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” That’s efficacious grace. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me” exercise efficacious grace and “draw him.”

Notice verse 37, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I shall in no wise cast out.” So you see, it is the Father who draws men to Christ.

By the way, that word “draw” is the word that is translated often in the Book of Acts or I think it is translated at least once, but it has the idea of dragging. People dragged before a judgment seat. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, drag him.”

You know, we ought to laugh about in the election of 1964 at some of the statements that were made about Barry Goldwater. Even though many of us may have supported him, we couldn’t help but laugh at some of the things that they said about him. Cause they said some comical things about him, some ridiculous things, and then some funny things, like one man said, “We’re going to try to drag Barry Goldwater screaming into the 20th Century.”

And you know, when we think about efficacious grace, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” almost against his will, screaming, you know, to faith in Christ? And yet the Bible doesn’t say that men are brought to salvation still resisting. The Pulpit Commentary said that this refers to a word of resistless or at least successful force. Calvin said, “This is the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit which makes men willing who formerly were unwilling.”

That’s efficacious grace, the powerful force of the Holy Spirit that makes men willing who formerly were unwilling. That’s efficacious grace. Now, some of you still may not believe this. I hope you do because you’ll lose a lot of Christian joy if you don’t. But some of you sing it even when you don’t believe it, because this hymn is sung in Arminian churches. It has a stanza, “Tis done. The great transaction’s done. I am my Lord’s and he is mine. He drew me and I followed on, charmed to confess the voice desire.” “He drew me and I followed on.”

Now, another thing, this is a supernatural work. It not only is a divine influence that leads to an act, an event, salvation; it is a supernatural work. What does the Bible

say about man? Can someone tell me? About man’s condition? What are some of the things the Bible says about man? Unrighteous? All right. He uses figures of men’s condition physically to describe his condition spiritually. What else does it say? Lost? Dead? Deaf? I didn’t hear that. Right. Enemies? Blind? Now, it also says he’s a slave.

What does it take for a man who is a slave? He’s unrighteous? He’s blind? He’s deaf? He’s dead? What does it take? Why, my friend, it takes a supernatural work, supernatural work. And that is what efficacious grace is.

Now, last year, when we were talking about this one week, the next week Chris Warman came up to me and was talking about a man that she had been speaking to, and I took it down. I went home and wrote it out. And this is what she said.

She was telling me about this friend of hers who was a Roman Catholic man, a man whom, in her own words had everything going for him, and she was speaking about how difficult it was to reach him for the Lord.

And she was gaining some sympathy from me and finally she added this. She said, “The only thing that will move him is a bolt from the blue.” And I said, “Chris, that’s efficacious grace.”

The bolt from the blue, the thing that will move a man like that; that’s efficacious grace. That’s the thing that takes a man and turns him completely around. And every one of you in this audience knows exactly what I am talking about if you’re a Christian. That’s efficacious grace. What is the means of it? It’s the Holy Spirit.

Will you turn with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 13, verse 14. 2 Thessalonians 2, 13 and 14, Paul says:

“But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you for salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

Now, notice, the sanctification of the Spirit occurred before belief of the truth. It’s the setting apart of the Holy Spirit. God hath chosen you. He has elected you to salvation through the setting apart of the Holy Spirit and belief of the truth. Whereunto he calls you by the gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And so God, you see, elects us, and the Holy Spirit sets us apart and sets us apart to faith in Jesus Christ.

That is the work of efficacious grace. It is the work of the Spirit who, in response to God’s eternal election, at the precise point that God desires, brings us to faith in Christ. Some of us are brought to Christ as a young person; some as a teenager, some in business. Those that are really tough and hard get saved, finally, when they are twenty-five years of age after they have already been in business three or four years, like I was. It took the Lord twenty-five years in my case, but he overcame.

Now, I want you to turn to another passage. I want you to see it a second time. 1 Peter chapter 1 in verse 2, 1 Peter 1, verse 2. Here Peter says:

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” [Now, notice] “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctification of the Spirit” [Now, notice again that it is before we are saved that the Spirit works.] “Through the setting apart of the Holy Spirit, unto” [This is the purpose of his setting apart] “Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

And so it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith in Christ and then the blood is sprinkled upon us; the figure, of course, of the application of the blessings of redemption. Now, the fruit of efficacious grace. Well, the initial fruit is faith. It is the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith. Our faith is the work of God. Our faith is not

something that arises within us entirely. Men believe. God doesn’t believe. Faith is a human activity. But it is instigated, initiated by God. Now, listen to the text.

“For by grace are you saved through faith.”

And that, not just the faith, but the whole procedure, By grace, salvation, through faith, that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. The grace, the salvation, the faith, the whole thing is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast. And so the fruit of efficacious grace is faith.

Ultimately, as we read in 2 Thessalonians, it is glory. In the meantime, it’s salvation and service, which should result in the magnification of the divine purpose.

Now, why have I stressed this? This question of efficacious grace so much in the last few years? Well, for this reason. You see, what a man believes about efficacious grace will have practical effects in all of his Christian activity. This means, actually, that salvation is God’s work, not man’s. It means that God’s work of salvation is not hurried along by stronger appeal. It’s not effectuated by stronger appeal.

You ask why we do not issue a public invitation to come down front so we can urge you and stir you further. It’s because God saves the souls of men. And we do not hurry God along by our invitations. We do not effectuate salvation by our appeals and our emotion.

The Holy Spirit is not shoved into his activity by what we do. Salvation is not made easier or quicker by mightier arguments. If that were so then the men who had the mightiest ability to argue the faith would be the greatest of the evangelists. And I think, in our day, we all at least would say that Billy Graham is an evangelist and not the greatest exponent of the Christian faith in a logical way.

Salvation is not effectuated by more sparkling personalities, more telling in illustrations, longer invitations, keener psychological incite. Salvation is effectuated by

God the Holy Spirit. And our duty is to give the message under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to work. And if he doesn’t work, we can assume one of two things. Number one, they don’t belong to the elect. Or, number two, it’s not their time yet. Beyond that, we cannot go.

That means if we faithfully proclaim the Gospel and nothing happens, we should not be discouraged. And of course, if something does happen then we are happy and joyed. And so it helps us in our Christian life. It helps us within our Christian ministry. It enables us to carry on a ministry that is Scriptural and ultimately that pleases God.

Now, I know a person says, “Well, what about human responsibility?” If efficacious grace is necessary to salvation and if God, alone, can supply such grace then God cannot hold us responsible if we reject the Savior?

There are two fallacies for that kind of reasoning. The first place is that man has no claim on God’s grace. No man can question why he gives it to some and not to others. To contemplate why anyone is saved, not why anyone is lost, is the only proper approach. The real problem is not why some are lost; the real problem is, my dear friend, how you got saved; because we all should have been lost.

And then, such reasoning forgets that in every case where efficacious grace is not experienced, common grace has been received and rejected. If I knew, for example, that you needed a hundred dollars and I went over to you and gave you a dollar and you said, “No, thank you,” then you couldn’t blame me for not giving you a hundred, if you rejected the one. And man rejects the common grace of God. And when he rejects the common grace of God he has no excuse because he does not receive efficacious grace.

Now, I don’t have time to give any illustrations but how many of you can tell me one good illustration of efficacious grace in the New Testament? I’ll see if you’ve been learning anything. I said I’m going to be disappointed. But remember the doctrines of election and sovereign grace, and I’ll take comfort in that. You were sleeping.

Give me a good illustration of efficacious grace? Can you think of any? All right, Paul. A good illustration. Anyone else? Well, of course, you could say, anyone who was ever saved is a good illustration, that’s true. Do you remember Lydia? Whose heart the Lord opened? “That she attended unto the thing that was spoken by Paul.” That was efficacious grace. She was already a proselyte. She had common grace. She was a religious woman. She even prayed. But she did not until that moment become the effectual recipient of the grace that saves.

Judas was a man who had common grace but no efficacious grace. He even acknowledged that Jesus Christ did not sin, that he had sinned, that he was righteous. He was religious. As far as we can tell, he even performed works in the name of the Lord. But he was lost. He rejected the grace that he had. He did not have efficacious grace.

Now, the next time we are going to plunge into our subject in even more detail. We’re going to talk about the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. That’s very important. So next Monday night that will be our topic.

Let’s close in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word and for Thy truth and for this wonderful teaching that in accordance with sovereign mercy as a result of eternal election, we have been brought in grace to Jesus Christ and to salvation. Salvation is truly of the Lord. And Thou hast broken down all of our resistance and has drawn us to him. O Father, accept our thanks, and may the gratitude, which comes into the human heart when we realize what Thou hast done move and motivate us to be the link in the chain between God and others who are Thine.

As we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.