



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“The Doctrine of Common Grace”

TRANSCRIPT

According to that clock up there. So let's begin with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the opportunity of the study of the Scriptures again. And we ask Lord that through our study tonight we may come to understand in a deeper way all that you have done for us through the saving ministry of Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for each one present and we pray Lord Thy blessing upon them as we study the Scriptures together.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject is number seventeen in our series “The Piety, Morality, and Prosperity of the Natural Man” or “The Doctrine of Common Grace.” And so we're going to read a few verses from the word which have to do with common grace as an introduction to our studies. So will you take your New Testaments and turn with me to Acts chapter 14 and we're going to read verses 16 and 17 for our first two verses. Acts chapter 14 verses 16 and 17, Paul is at Lystra and at Lystra he says concerning God,

“The Doctrine of Common Grace” by S. Lewis Johnson
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“Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

And I want you really to notice that here in these two verses we have reference to some of the activity of God toward all men.

Now, turn over to the next book in the New Testament, the Book of Romans and let’s read a few verses here. In Romans chapter 2 in verse 4, we read,

“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

Notice, the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering then drop your eyes down to the fourteenth verse or up to the fourteenth if its that way in your text.

“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.” Notice the work of the law is written in their hearts. “Their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.”

Now, you can see from this that the Apostle Paul states that man does have a moral indicator implanted by God in his heart which he calls conscience. Now, will you turn over a few more pages in Romans to chapter 13 and listen as I read verses 1 through 4. And notice here that government is referred to and government is referred to as a minister of God. Verse 1,

“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.” In other words, God is responsible for government. “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 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: For he is the minister of God to thee for good.” Now I must confess that I have great difficulty in thinking of some of the human rulers that we have had as ministers of God but that’s what Paul states. “But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”

So here we have a statement by Paul to the effect that government is a ministry which God provides us. Now, will you turn back to Acts chapter 7 and let’s read verse 51 of Acts 7. It’s in Steven’s speech and he states here that not only does God give to the unsaved certain general blessings such as goodness, rain, food, a conscience, government, but here he even says that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of men who reject him. We read in verse 51,

“Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.”

So here we have reference to a ministry of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who are rebelling against God. So it is not true to say the Holy Spirit only works in the hearts of the elect. He even works in the hearts of some of the non-elect.

Now, John chapter 16 and verses 7 and 8 and these are our last two passages. And they are somewhat parallel to the one that I have just read. You’ll notice that I have read these Scriptures in their logical order. We have moved from natural good which

God provides through conscience, government now to spiritual good. Verse 7 of John chapter 16,

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come,” that is the comfort of the Holy Spirit, “when he has come he will reprove the world of sin.”

Now, notice it is the world. He will convince the world of sin. He will convince the world of righteousness and he will convince the world of judgment. I think that probably the force convince in English conveys a little too strong an impression but at least means something like convict and reprove may be very close to the sense but notice the Holy Spirit exercises a ministry toward the world.

Now, our subject tonight is the “Doctrine of Common Grace.” The problem of the goodness of the natural man is essentially a theological problem, but nevertheless this subject is called forth by some practical questions. Have you ever had anyone asked you this question or have you ever thought about this question? Why are many non-Christians good men? Have you ever felt embarrassed, for example, having to say according to scriptural teaching when someone asks you is that so and so a good man and you say yes he’s a good man. Well, don’t you think he’s going to heaven? No I don’t think he’s going to heaven. And so you seem to be put in the position of believing that bad men go to heaven and good men don’t. What about good men? Why are some many of them pointed out to us as good men? Why are non-Christians religious? We can understand how Christians might be spiritual and interested in spiritual things but what about non-Christians. Why are they religious? Why are they spiritual? What accounts for it? Have you ever wondered too why we have a relatively orderly kind of life in the creation that is under the curse? If the Bible is true when man fell, God put man under a curse. The

whole creation is under the curse. Men are born condemned. The whole creation brings forth thorns and thistles as evident of the fact that it stands under the curse. And yet in spite of the fact that men and the creation are under the curse, we have a relatively orderly kind of life. How can you explain that?

This problem has received different solution. The Pelagians. Do you remember Pelagius? If you’re a theologian you ought to get acquainted with Pelagius. I’ve referred to him several times and occasionally in preaching or teaching a Bible teacher might say that Pelagianism. And what he means is it’s a teaching that may be traced back, if not directly at least in its essence, to the British monk whose name as Pelagius. Pelagius was a popular preacher in the city of Rome at the beginning of the fifth century. He preached there for about the years 201 to 409 A.D. And he, among other doctrines, rejected the original sin of man in the Garden of Eden. He did not believe that all men were sinners. Other things that he did not believe were these: he did not believe the need of internal grace to obey God, he did not, therefore, believe in redemption, he believed that the fall did not affect the free will of man, he believed that human nature had the power for good and that is essentially Pelagianism. That is that man can really please God by virtue of his own efforts and own works. In other words, Pelagianism is a kind of rationalized moralism. It’s the type of thinking that almost every unsaved man engages in if he doesn’t have much contact with the word of God. He believes that men really are pretty good men. That basically we have a streak of good. Oh some of us embarrass the rest of the human race but most of us are pretty good. And we can do good in our own strength and the very fact that God commands is evidence of the fact that he has given us the nature wherewith we may do good.

Now, if you read the newspapers, if you listen to the TV, if you listen to your radio you will discover, no doubt if you have not already discovered, that practically all TV commentators, practically all radio commentators, practically all commentators on human affairs are Pelagians. After they point out the evils that exist, they will always give

us a little hope almost always. And say there is no hope in spite of these things that man is going to make things good in the final analysis.

Now, the Pelagians, of course, answered this question why are non-Christians good men by simply saying men are really good. But, the Augustinians, those who followed the great Augustine and Augustine himself, they taught that man was totally unable to do good. This, of course, was the forerunner of modern day Calvinism. When the Pelagians pointed to virtuous men then and said look here is a man who is a virtuous man, here is a man who is a good man, and here is a man who is a model citizen in the community. How can you possibly say that man is totally unable to do good? You must be blind. Men do, do good. And so Augustine simply said “The virtues that you see, and I admit that they are there, they are really sins. And the reason that they are sins is because these works, which you say are good works, were not originated in faith, they did not proceed from faith, and furthermore, they do not tend to glorify God, they tend to glorify man, they are not motivated by love to God but love of self.”

Now, this was, of course, a head on collision between philosophers of life, one that man is good and does good. The other man does not do good and what you think is good is really sin because it arises out of wrong motivation. They do not do good for good’s sake. They do good for self’s sake. Now, I think we all grant that a man may do good for self’s sake. He may do good not in order to glorify God, not really to benefit man but to gain glorify for himself.

A few years ago, I was speaking with someone at SMU. And this man had access to what went on among those who were contributors to that fine university. And they said to me, “You know it’s an interesting thing, but it’s very easy for us to get contributions with strings attached. But it’s very difficult for us to get contributions to the general fund. It’s easy for us to get contributions with strings attached such as if I give you a million dollars will you name the building after me or after my family. And even in our most philanthropic human endeavor, there is selfishness.

Now, we have talked about total depravity, and we have said that total depravity does not mean that man does not do anything good. It means that everything that he does is touched by his sin nature. That’s what total depravity means. Well, the Augustinians and the Pelagians, of course, clashed on this as they clashed all the way down in all of the doctrines of theology for one is the doctrine that man does it, the other is the doctrine that God does it.

Now, when reformation took place, the reformers developed a doctrine which is not specifically taught in the word of God by name called common grace. And the reason they developed this is because they saw that in the Scriptures there were evidences that God did provide blessings for men who were not among those that were ultimately saved. Calvin, for example, claimed that man can of himself do no good whatsoever. The good that man seems to do is the result of God’s common grace. So, for example, when a man who is a governor engages in activity that is good, it is because God is at work among such men. And that we, in reality, the good that a governor may do is traceable to God. It is his common grace.

Now, common grace, Calvin, the reformers, and almost all Bible teachers today, who study the Bible much, common grace is that which curbs sin. The reason you can get in your car and drive over to Believers Chapel and not be shot or robbed or raped or other violence, and I grant you apparently God’s common grace is giving out in the twentieth century, but the reason that you can is essentially because of common grace, God’s provision. If men really expressed their natures, we would have a totally violent society, completely selfish and nobody would be safe on the street. We would really live in a jungle and only the strongest and the greediest would survive. So common grace then was the reformation explanation and has been the biblical explanation of the apparent fact that men seem to be good. Common grace curbs sin, it maintains moral order in the universe, it distributes gifts and talents among men. Promotes art and

science, in other words, most of the good that we see is really the result of the grace of God.

Now, this doctrine of common grace has more definitely to do with the operations of God’s spirit in the realm of creation than in the realm of redemption. And so in many of our theologies, the doctrine of common grace is not considered when soteriology is studied, but there is a relationship, I think, between common grace and the redemptive process and so we are going to consider it in our study of soteriology as many theologians do.

Well, let’s turn to our outline now in roman I – “The Name and Concept of Common Grace. And capital A - The Name. I didn’t put capital A on the board here but capital A – “The Name and capital B – “The Concept,” naturally.

“The Name” - What does common grace mean? Common grace is thought by some to mean grace that is common to all men. And I think there is a sense in which that may be justified. However, it is usually called common grace because the effects produced by common grace are ordinary effects and they fall short of saving efficacy and that is why they are really called common. That is they are ordinary, they fall short of salvation, they are the things that God does for us which do not bring us to everlasting life.

Now, “The Concept” - These operations of the Spirit fall into three categories. First of all, there are those general blessings which he metes out to all creatures even animals. God is good to animals. But he is good to all creatures. He provides food. He provides drink. He provides clothing. He provides shelter. And he does this according to his good pleasure. The reason that the birds are able to live is ultimately because of the common grace of God. The reason that the animals have sufficient clothing in cold weather is because of the common grace of God. We try to help them all along a little bit and when in Dallas we have snow and ice, we rush down to the Safeway or to the Tom Thumb and we buy some seed for the birds and we throw it out, but I’m sure that

whether we did or not the birds most of them would survive. God does take care of the birds. He even takes care of ravens.

And secondly, the general operations of the Spirit by which he, without renewing the heart, exercises moral influence through his revelation. He curbs sin. He promotes order. He promotes civil righteousness. These are things that he does in common grace.

And thirdly, not only his general blessings to all creatures such as food, drink, and clothing, not only his operations of the Spirit by which he curbs sin, promotes order and righteousness, but also his operations of the Spirit by which he influences men toward redemption, John 16 verses 7 and 8, even though he does not secure their redemption.

Now, I'm going to ask you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 14 because I want to illustrate this third of the operations of the Holy Spirit in common grace. 1 Corinthians chapter 7 in verse 14. 1 Corinthians 7 verse 14. Now isn't this an interesting chapter? This is the chapter in which Paul gives us some words about marriage.

This afternoon, I had a young couple come to me and we were going over the marriage ceremony which is being performed here on Friday night in the chapel. And during the course of our discussion, you know it's a wonderful thing to sit down with a young couple and both are Christians, and when both know what they're doing. And furthermore, when both realize that their marriage is a marriage that is to be founded in the word of God. And I have real hopes for this marriage surviving. And during the course of our discussion, we were talking about some of the things pertain to marriage and the young man who is a real fine young man spoke to me and said Dr Johnson what are some of the passages in the Bible that said set forth the relationship of husband and wife? I was talking about the relationship of wife to husband and of husband to wife and I was really trying to get over the fact that she better be in subjection to him, naturally. But he asked me that question and we had already talked about reading Ephesians chapter 5 in the ceremony and so I said well Ephesians 5:22 through 33 is probably the

most extended passage on the relationship of husband and wife. And then some of the other passages I mentioned such as Colossians chapter 3 and Hebrews chapter 13 and a few others and I made reference to this chapter because this chapter is a chapter that has something to say about marriage. And the point that it makes is simply this that even more important than your husband or your wife, as the case may be in a marriage, is God. And so this chapter contributes something of tremendous importance in marriage more important than my wife is God in the marriage relationship.

Now, Paul answers some other question that have to do with marriage in this chapter. For example, what shall we do when we have a situation in which one unbelieving member of the family has now been saved husband or wife? What shall we do? Shall we put away our wife or put away our husband as the case may be. In the Old Testament, Israel was told that they should not marry any of the heathens. So now naturally a person acquainted with the Scriptures not knowing all of the New Testament revelations if he had become a Christian and his wife was not a Christian and she was giving him trouble he might want to escape by the Old Testament principle of well get rid of the wife that is not a true Israelite or in the New Testament sense not a true believer. And so the apostle has some words to say about that and in the midst of these words he says in verse 14 an interesting thing. He says, “For the unbelieving.” Well let’s read verse 13, “And the woman which hath an 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.” Think of that, think of that men, the unbelieving husband is actually sanctified, not saved, sanctified by the wife. Remember sanctified means to be set apart, to have a special relationship. That’s your relationship to the Lord.

So take a young couple. They both marry and they are not Christians. Shortly after, the wife comes in Believers Chapel and she hears the gospel from the Sunday school or the ministry of the word service and she becomes a believer. Immediately, her husband is sanctified. He’s not saved, but he’s sanctified because now he’s living in a

different sphere. He's living in a home in which there is one who belongs to the Lord. He's living in the presence of a saint for his wife has become a saint and now he is set apart too, sanctified. Well, that's common grace with reference to him. He's not saved. It's not special grace that brings him to Christ. Sometimes he does not respond. Sometimes he dies without Christ but he dies sanctified. He lives sanctified. That is until he dies.

So he says, "Elsewhere your children are unclean; but now are they holy." And even the children are sanctified before they're saved. Think of that. You can be sanctified before you're saved. If you're a child of a parent that is a Christian, you live in a different sphere. And anyone who knows what it is to live in a Christian home or where one is a Christian know that that sphere is different the moment one becomes a Christian. In a sense, the influence of God has come into that home and into that family.

Now, that is common grace. That does not bring them to salvation. It is designed to influence them towards salvation but it does not bring them to salvation. It is common grace. So this is the operation of the Spirit by which he influences men towards redemption. And our John 16:7 and 8 passage in which we read of the convicting work of the Spirit is another parallel.

So then, to sum up then we must distinguish common grace from special grace by pointing these things. First of all, common grace is not limited to the elect. Special grace is limited to the elect. As a matter of fact, sometimes it seems as if the non-elect have more grace of a common character than the elect because I may look over here at an elect, I'm not looking at you Paul really to give an illustration of this but my eyes just happen to fall on him. But you may find, for example, here is a man who is elect but he's not very rich in this world's goods. Now, that doesn't apply to you Paul so you know it's not speaking of you. But here is a man who does not have much of this world's goods. As a matter of fact, he may have troubles and trials. He may have had tragedy in his life but he belongs to the Lord. And over here is another man and he is

wealthy. Why it would take you four or five pages to read through his portfolio. And he has a manger who takes care of his estate. And he has every kind of physical advantage that a man might have. He’s in good health. He looks like Rock Hudson when you look at him. He has every kind of physical advantage, every kind of material advantage and furthermore, he is a man who is popular with a wonderful personality. He has been lavishly given common grace but he’s not one of the elect. So it is possible for a man who is a non-elect to apparently have more common grace than the elect. Common grace then is not limited to the elect. Special grace is. Common grace may be given lavishly to the non-elect. A second fact, common grace does not remove the guilt and penalty of sin. It does not remove the pollution of sin. Special grace does. Special grace is the grace that brings us to salvation. We’re going to talk about that next Monday. And that grace, not only bring us to salvation and removes the guilt of sin, but also ultimately removes the pollution of sin. And thirdly, common grace is resistible. It is possible for us to so rebel against common grace that we do not even receive its testimony. Now, Romans chapter 1 Paul tells us how God has spoken to man through the creation and man even though he saw the light of the fact that God was a supreme being his eternal power and divinity he turned away from that grace. So it is possible to resist common grace but special grace is ultimately irresistible. Irresistible. In other words, the special grace is the grace that God exercises in bringing us to Christ. And ultimately, it shall bring everyone one of the Lord’s sheep to him. No one shall be left outside the fold. So let’s move on. That was the name and the concept.

Second, roman II – “The Means of Common Grace. Now, we’re going to list several and I’ll look up the Scripture on a few of them but not all of them. What does God use in bestowing common grace upon us? Well, first of all, he uses the creation itself. Let’s turn to that Romans 1 passage and read beginning at verse 18, Romans 1 verse 18 through verse 23. This is a great passage in which we are told that God speaks

through the creation. Let’s see what he says to us through it and what he says generally.

Page 1192 verse 18,

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them.” Notice that. “That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.” What has he shewed unto them? “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen.” They are invisible but they are clearly seen. “Being understood by the things that are made.” In other words, as we look at the creation, we’re able to see these things that cannot be seen about God. What are they? Verse 20, “Even his eternal power and deity.”

Now, I do not think you can see the trinity. And I know that Moody has a film in which there is a remarkable series of pictures by which Dr. Moon shows the fact that there is the universe itself has a Trinitarian stamp about it, and it is really remarkable. And I’m willing to grant that that may be so but they could never prove the Trinity from that. That may be an evidence of such, but Paul is talking about is his eternal power and his deity. That is that God is the Supreme Being. You have notice yourself how in the newspapers how often people refer to God, who do not seem to know anything about the Bible, as the supreme being. Have you ever heard that term? That’s not a biblical term. How did men arrive at that term? Well, that’s the natural response of looking at the creation. They have learned that he is a being and that he is a supreme being. He has eternal power and deity and so in that you find evidence of the fact they are the recipients of common grace. When you hear somebody call God the supreme being or speak about the supreme being, you can say to that man you have been the recipient of common grace. [Laughter] Do that sometime. If you do that, you might be able to engage them in conversation. Verse 21,

“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.”

You will notice that in the religious sphere we do not evolution but devolution. So man has the light of the creation, and through the creation by God’s common grace, he is able to see his eternal power and divinity but he has turned from it. Secondly, man has the light of conscience. We read Romans 2:14 and 15 so we need not do that. There is something down in the heart of man that is able to distinguish between right and wrong.

Now, ultimately we may so reject our conscience’s warning that Paul says our conscience may become singed and unable to function. And that is, we all acknowledge, a true fact but it is something that God has given us as common grace. It does not save us. Third, God works through the restraint of human government. Laws and the enforcement of laws are ultimately related to God’s common grace. So government is a means of God’s common grace to us. I’m very thankful for government. Where would we be if we did not have government, even bad government is better than no government at all. Fourth, it is possible that we should think of public opinion as common grace. I’m not sure of this but Professor Berkhoff, who was one of our outstanding theologians, has said that public opinion is common grace. And that, of course, is formed by these others forces of common grace. Public opinion is formed by the light of creation. It is formed by the light of man’s conscience. It’s formed by the necessity of restraint through government.

Did you notice that in the election of 1960, one of the chief reasons, I guess, that JFK was elected president was because he kept harping on the fact that our national image had been destroyed before the nations of the world? And he made us all feel real bad that we were Americans you know. And no doubt he won many a vote because he said we’ve lost our image. Public opinion itself can be a force for good. And so it may be that we should say that one of the means of common grace is public opinion. A fifth is the conviction that men have that there is punishment and reward. And for this there are natural and rational reasons aside from the scriptural. I think that we could look at the creation itself and we could come to the conclusions that God must punish men. You don’t have to be a Christian to know that. If you are a thinker, for example, we live in a place where you can grow beautiful roses. I have an aunt up the street from me who has been president of Dallas Rose Society. I’ve been introduced to all of the politics of the Dallas Rose Society through my friend. He has some beautiful roses in his backyard but roses after the blooming season is over they are certainly a straggly looking plant.

Now, if roses are beautiful and we glorify God because of the beauty of the roses when they are not blooming, they are not very pretty. The decay suggests something that is bad or take something better as an illustration. We may look up into the beautiful sky and it’s beautiful and it’s blue but it’s not long before it’s black and when we see forked lightening and hear thunder. If one suggests the goodness of God, the other suggests the severity of God. Or if we look up and we see beautiful birds, we are seeing mocking birds and blue birds and red birds over at my house. And I listen to the jaybirds squawking all the time. But it’s not long before you look up in the sky and you see a hawk and if you have evidence of God’s gifts to men, you have evidence of the fact that in goodness you have evidence of the fact that there is a streak in nature that’s suggests punishment that suggests judgment. We look at mountains and they are lovely and then one them bursts forth with a volcano in its midst. So goodness and severity go hand and hand.

We look at the sea and I love the sea. When I retire from preaching, when I'm ninety-five years of age, I'm going back to live by the side of the sea because I love the sea. But the sea is the source of tidal waves and so that which suggests the goodness of God also suggests the judgment of God, rivers and falls.

Or take a look at history. If you look at human history, history shows that God is not only love, he not only is the source of scientific advance, he is not only the one who has given us a Washington and a Lincoln, I hate to say it as a Southerner, but he gave us Lincoln and he gave us Robert E. Lee, one of his great blessings to us. He not only has shown that he is a God of love in his gifts of men through history but he has also shown that there is a streak in his universe that suggest judgment. He is a consuming fire. We have wars. And if a Lincoln and a Washington arise also a Stalin or a Hitler arise too. Someone has said that if there is no hell we would be compelled to invent one. Browning said there may be a heaven there must be a hell. In other words, there was more evidence for the punishment of God then there is for the ultimate good of God to men. Some men wonder if God really is good. They look at society and they see ills in the society and they say God must not be good or else he's a God who cannot do anything about anything down here on the earth a limited God.

Now, you know if you really believed that God was only good, it's a surprising thing that universalist denomination, which was merged with the Unitarian not long ago, it's a surprising thing that there are so few Universalists around. That is those who believe that everybody is going to heaven. You know how many were in the Universalists denomination before they united with the Unitarian a few years ago. After all of their years, they had only seventy five thousand members. Now, a church with such good doctrine as that everybody is going to heaven you would think that people would be crowding to join a church like that. All you have to do would be just to put up your doctrinal statement and people would just rush in from all over the countryside wouldn't they? Why is it that they have so few members? Why it's because man deep down in his

heart knows that it is not true. Someone has said, “Nobody is quite a universalist in moments of indignation.” And so there is something in human nature that shows us that it’s not right.

Now, we must base it on to the fruits of common grace. Let me quickly suggest some of the fruits of common grace. First of all, because of common grace the execution of God’s wrath is postponed. This provides an opportunity for men to have room repentance. Secondly, sin is restrained. As a matter of fact, the reason that we have life as we have it now is because of common grace. Thirdly, there is a human possession of the sense of morality and spirituality. Many men have this sense of morality. Many men have this sense of spirituality who are not Christians at all. When Paul was in the church in Athens, when he was in the city of Athens in the midst of his address to the Aeriopagus he said that “Ye men of Athens I foresee that all things you’re very religious.” Too superstitious our Authorized version reads, its something like very religious that word means. So the apostle testified to the fact that the Athenians had a sense of spirituality a sense of morality.

About 18 years ago, the national open golf tournament was held in Dallas at the Northwood country club which is just a mile or so away from here. And I’ve always been interested in golf and used to play in amateur golf tournaments all over the country many years ago. And so I went out to that national open and one of my friends in the city who listened to me preach every now and then gave me a season ticket, so I was out there for five of the days and several of the men who were playing I knew. Most of them now have retired that I knew. But there was an amateur who was playing at that time who was an old friend of mine. I had actually played with him in golf and when we were both teenagers and stayed in his home and I knew him real well. And so in one of the practice rounds, I followed him around and we had a good bit quite a bit of conversation and he knew what I was doing that I was a preacher. He asked me things about it but I could tell he was not really happy over the fact that I had become a preacher. But in the

course of the tournament later on I saw him when Julius Boris was near to winning the tournament. And he was telling me that he knew Boris because Boris had been a professional in the state of North Carolina. And that he was telling me all about him and he went out of his way to tell me that Julius Boris was a religious man. Now, all that showed me that my friend, Charles Dudley, was the recipient of common grace because he had been influenced by God to the extent that he had some sense of the significance of spirituality, a sense of fear of God so to speak.

Now, that is common grace. It is one of the means that God uses to awaken in us a sense of himself. So that is one of the truths of common grace. Fourth, the performance of civil righteousness and outward good this is a fruit of common grace. Such good, of course, is only from the natural and material point of view and not from the divine point of view. But it is good. Now, if we took this good that is human good and measured it by the divine standard, of course, would come short. In the Old Testament, we read all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. That is when we look at a man and say ah he’s a good man. He’s a philanthropist. We are using human standards to judge his good. Now, we can say he is the recipient of common grace and that is why he appears to be good. And there is a sense in which he does do good, in which he does have certain senses that are good. But in the final analysis his good is insufficient to measure up to the divine standard and that is why good men who are not Christian do not go to heaven. They possess human good but they do not possess divine good. They do not possess a righteousness that is acceptable to God for all of their righteousness are touched by depravity. Let me illustrate. I intend to tell this story but the other morning but like so many times when I get preaching, I get so interested in excited in what I’m trying to get over that I don’t always say what I want to say.

Maury Tory was a great preacher. And Mr. Tory had some evangelistic meetings, he used to have them all over the country, but he has some evangelistic meetings in one locale. And after one of the meetings as he was walking out a man called him over and

said “Dr. Tory may I have a word with you?” He said “Sure” and they sat down. He said “Dr. Tory I want you to know I’m not a Christian but I also want you to know I live a very moral life. He said I do right by my family. I do right by my friends. I do right by my employees. And so far as I can tell, there isn’t anything along that line that I do not do but from what you’ve told me tonight you seem to say that I’m not going to heaven because I’m not a Christian. Is that so?” Dr Tory said “That’s absolutely right, you’re going straight to hell.” He said “Well, I don’t understand. I’ve done good by all of these people and yet you say I’m going to hell.”

Dr Tory said “let me illustrate. Let’s just suppose for the sake of illustration that you have a wonderful mother.” He said “oh I have.” He said “Let’s suppose that your mother has been wonderful to you through your life.” “Oh but she has” he says. “But let’s suppose that your mother has scrimped and saved and actually suffered the loss of the comforts of life in order to see you educated. And let’s suppose that she loves you so much that she has sacrificed and sacrificed and she would be willing to die for you.” And he said “Now let’s suppose just for the sake of illustration that you have done good by everybody in your family but your mother. And let’s just suppose for the sake of illustration that when she grows old that you don’t want her around and you turn her out and let her starve to death on the street. What kind of person would you be sir?” He said “Well. Dr Tory I’d be a scoundrel.” He said “Well you see there happens to be a person who has given for you far greater than you know that would be Jesus Christ. He has actually so given himself for you that you cannot really measure what he has done. You owe everything to him. He said sure you’ve been good to your family. You’ve been good to your friends. You’ve been good to your business associates. You’ve done right by everybody but the one person that really counts. Now, sir what kind of person are you?” He said, “Dr Tory I’m a scoundrel.” You see that’s the way a man really stands who is a wonderful citizen, a wonderful leader in the community, a wonderfully good

friend, a philanthropist but if he is neglected his relationship to his God he’s a scoundrel. That’s what he is in the sight of God.

So, I wanted to get one last result of truth of common grace. Natural blessings of life we read Acts chapter 14 verses 16 and 17 as testimony to that. So we all have been recipients of common grace. Some of us, I hope all in this room, have been recipients of effectual grace. If we have been recipients of common grace, we have certain things that may be said of us. We know about God. We have spiritual instincts. We have a fear of God. We have a sense of the fact that he’s going to judge men and there are other things that he may add. If we had been the recipients of effectual grace we have come to know Jesus Christ as personal savior.

Now, next week we’re going to talk about the processes whereby the Holy Spirit brings us to Christ. So let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the explanation in Thy word of some of the problems of life. We recognize that there are evidences of the fact that Thou has been good even for those who have not yet been the recipients of special grace. And we pray Lord that we not fail to respond for the working of the Holy Spirit.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.