

Orthodoxy - Special and Common Grace

New City Catechism Q.27: Are all people, just as they were lost through Adam, saved through Christ?

Answer: No, only those who are elected by God and united to Christ by faith. Nevertheless God in his mercy demonstrates common grace even to those who are not elect, by restraining the effects of sin and enabling works of culture for human well-being.

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. - Romans 5:17

This question and answer tells us that God is gracious. His special saving grace is limited to those he has chosen. His common grace is unlimited toward all people. He is gracious in a special way to save those who he has loved before the foundation of the earth. He is gracious in a common way to all people hindering the effects of sin and providing for a daily display of his goodness.

God's special grace reveals that not all people will be saved. There are three clear teachings of Scripture concerning God's special grace. First, God desires that all sinners be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 18:23; Matthew 23:37). Second, God chose some people from eternity past, to be saved unconditionally. And third, only those elect will genuinely respond to the gospel and be saved (Matthew 22:14; John 6:37, 44, 65; 8:47; 10:26-29; Romans 8:29-30; 9:6-23; 11:5-10; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30; Ephesians 1:4-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; James 2:5). This means not all people will be saved.

Scripture reveals examples of these truths. I will mention one in the gospels. Jesus calls and appoints Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter to follow him as his disciples (Mk.3:13-19). However, at the end of three years of following Jesus Judas turns away, betrays Jesus into the hands of his murderers, and then in his despair hangs himself. Did Jesus know this about Judas during his ministry? In John 6 it is revealed that he did. Jesus has just given some difficult teachings and many of those who had been following him turn away. He turns to his 12 disciples and asks if they would like to go away also. Peter responds by saying "No", because Jesus has the words of life. At this point Jesus responds by saying, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." Then John tells us, "He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him. (John 6:70-71). Later at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry he prays to the Father saying, "While I was with them [the disciples], I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction [Judas], that the Scripture might be fulfilled." (John 17:12). Therefore, Judas is an example of the truth that not all people will be saved. However, Peter who was called at the same time, believed and struggled as a follower of Christ, was saved by grace. Following Jesus' prayer when Jesus is arrested Peter denies knowing Jesus, but repents, is later restored in his fellowship with Jesus, and he continues as a follower of Jesus until his death. Therefore, we see God's special grace toward the sinner Peter, but the sinner Judas was not saved by God's special grace in Jesus.

God's special grace for salvation is not given for all people, but God's common grace is given to all people everywhere. Martin Lloyd-Jones defines common grace as "those general operations of the Holy Spirit in which, without renewing the heart, He exercises a moral influence whereby sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted." This work of God's Spirit in the world is not a saving work but it is God's work to accomplish his purposes in the earth through his creatures. The creation and its creatures have been made subject to the fall into sin. However, God's common grace preserves and protects mankind from the disastrous effects of sin in this world. This undeserved blessing of God on all mankind also provides for the spreading of God's goodness in culture. God's common grace has provided all people with talents, gifts, and

assets to share in the cultivation of the world, or in culture making. When we see these shared in everyday life through everyday people we are experiencing the goodness and wisdom of God to the whole human race. Whether that be in being served by someone in the workplace, or enjoying a jazz concert, or reading a good book, or living in a land with just laws, we are enjoying God's common grace.

Not every person in the world is saved by God's special grace in Jesus Christ, but every person in the world is enjoying God's common grace. We must learn to be a people filled with gratitude as we acknowledge both in our lives and in the lives of others around us. We must also learn to value and love people as those who are enjoying and expressing God's common grace everyday, even when they may not be those who are saved by God's special grace. Yet, in our love for them we should be pointing them to the One who is sharing his goodness with them and through them, as the One who will not turn away anyone who turns to him in faith through Jesus Christ.

Ministry Together - Global Missions, Praying Together

Please participate in our ministry together as we pray together for the missionaries sent out into the world from Christ Covenant Church.

Phil and Windy Stogner - Serving with Mission to the World (MTW) in Glasgow, Scotland

- ❖ Pray for Phil as an unofficial member of the Session of the Glasgow City Free Church as he provides support and guidance to the Elders.
- ❖ Pray for Phil as he meets and ministers separately to 6 Pastors in the Argyll Presbytery on the West Coast of Scotland.
- ❖ Pray for Phil and Wendy as they minister to a church plant in Helensburgh, which is a 45 minute drive outside of Glasgow.
- ❖ Pray for a movement of the gospel in Scotland for renewal and revitalization in existing churches, and the planting of new churches.

Ed and Mindy Tarleton - Budapest Hungary

- ❖ Pray for elders to be raised up in the church where Ed serves.
- ❖ Pray for the SHARE Family Education Conference in Hungary.
- ❖ Pray for Mindy as she continues cancer treatments.

Life Together

At Christ Covenant we desire to see and steward a movement of the gospel that forms community. The apostle Paul tells us that "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" means to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3). This requires the Spirit's work in our lives evidenced by "humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love."(2). Therefore, we know that a movement of the gospel is the Spirit's work in his church to form life together, and he gives the gifts for that work. We must steward that movement in participation, and we must remember that is what it means to walk "worthy of the calling". God's calls us in Christ to be reconciled to him to participate in his life, and that call brings us into a participation of one another's life.

In the older writings this life together is called the communion of the saints. The Christian is united to Jesus Christ, the Head of the body, his church. Therefore, every Christian is united to one another, the body, to share in one another's gifts and graces. The writers of the Westminster Confession of Faith say that we are "obliged" to carry out life together for one another's good (WCF 26.1). We don't like to feel obligated to someone else. But that feeling is contrary to our calling. In a particular church we're not our own. Our time, talents, and treasures are for others good. Who are you building relationships with in the body of Christ at Christ Covenant? Who are you sharing life together with? Who are the people that are different from you and who share different interests than you do that you are seeking to share the goodness of God with for yours and their good in their inward and outward life? Let's pray for and participate in a movement of the gospel that forms community for God's glory.