

Calvinism – Common Grace

If we are to start from the premise that Grace is as it is defined, it may provide clarity.

Grace - (Webster's 1828 Dictionary)

GRACE, n. [L. *gratia*, which is formed on the Celtic; Eng. agree, congruous, and ready. The primary sense of *gratus*, is free, ready, quick, willing, prompt, from advancing.]

1. Favor; good will; kindness; disposition to oblige another; as a grant made as an act of grace.

God clearly demonstrates grace (unmerited favor) to the wicked.

#1 — Favorable attitude of God toward all His creatures, not only toward the elect.

Genesis 8:21 NASB

The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.

Genesis 9:11-12 NASB

I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth." [12] God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations

Matthew 5:45 NASB

so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Luke 6:35 NASB

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

Acts 14:16-17 NASB

In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; [17] and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

#2 — Restraint of sin. The wicked are simply not as wicked as they could be.

Genesis 20:6 NASB

Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.

Exodus 34:24 NASB

For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God.

1 Samuel 25:34 NASB

Nevertheless, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light as much as one male."

"But in the course of history the natural man is not fully self-conscious of his own position. The prodigal cannot altogether stifle his father's voice. There is a conflict of notions within him. But he himself is not fully and self-consciously aware of this conflict within him. He has within him the knowledge of God by virtue of his creation in the image of God. But this

idea of God is suppressed by his false principle, the principle of autonomy. This principle of autonomy is, in turn, suppressed by the restraining power of God's common grace. Thus the ideas with which he daily works do not proceed consistently from the one principle or from the other."

— Cornelius Van Til, *Defense*, 170.

"The origin of the doctrine of common grace was occasioned by the fact that there is in the world, alongside of the course of the Christian life with all its blessings, a natural course of life, which is not redemptive and yet exhibits many traces of the true, the good, and the beautiful. The question arose, How can we explain the comparatively orderly life in the world, seeing that the whole world lies under the curse of sin? How is it that the earth yields precious fruit in rich abundance and does not simply bring forth thorns and thistles? How we can we account for it that sinful man still retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior? What explanation can be given for the special gifts and talents that with which the natural man is endowed, and of the development of science and art by those who are entirely devoid of the new life that is in Christ Jesus? How can we explain the religious aspirations of men everywhere, even of those who did not come in touch with the Christian religion? How can the unregenerate still speak truth, do good to others, and lead outwardly virtuous lives?"

— Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 432-446.

"... we believe that all things without exception are under divine providence: whether heavenly or sublunary, great or small, necessary and natural or free and contingent. Thus nothing in the nature of things can be granted or happen which does not depend on it. The reasons are: (1) God created all things, therefore He also takes care of all things. For if it was glorious for God to create them, it ought not to be unbecoming in Him to take care of them. Nay, as He created, He is bound to conserve and govern them continually, since He never deserts His own work, but ought to be perpetually present with it that it may not sink back into nothingness."

— Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*.

"After these common mercies, I say, whereof the reprobate are often partakers, he openeth the treasure of his rich mercies, which are kept in Christ Jesus for his Elect. Such as willingly delight not in blindness may clearly see that the Holy Ghost maketh a plain difference betwixt the graces and mercies which are common to all, and that sovereign mercy which is immutably reserved to the chosen children."

— John Knox, *On Predestination*, 87.

"There are graces of two sorts. First, common graces, which even reprobates may have. Secondly, peculiar, such as accompany salvation, as the Apostle has it, proper to God's own children only. The matter is not whether we have the first sort of graces, for those do not seal up God's special love to a man's soul, but it must be saving grace alone that can do this for us."

— Robert Harris, *Westminster Divines*.

Here are some quotes by John Calvin:

"Paul, accordingly, after reminding the Athenians that they "might feel after God and find him," immediately adds, "that he is not far from every one of us," (Acts 17:27); every man having within himself undoubted evidence of the heavenly grace by which he lives, and moves, and has his being."

— John Calvin, *Book 1, Chapter 5:3*.

"Read Demosthenes or Cicero, read Plato, Aristotle, or any other of that class: you will, I admit, feel wonderfully allured, pleased, moved, enchanted; but turn from them to the reading of the Sacred Volume, and whether you will or not, it will so affect you, so pierce your heart, so work its way into your very marrow, that, in comparison of the impression so produced, that of orators and philosophers will almost disappear; making it manifest that in the Sacred Volume there is a truth divine, a something which makes it immeasurably superior to all the gifts and graces attainable by man."

— John Calvin, *Book 1, Chapter 8:1*.

"The power of the intellect, secondly, with regard to the arts. Particular gifts in this respect conferred on individuals, and attesting the grace of God."

— John Calvin, *Chapter 2, heading*.

"In that some excel in acuteness, and some in judgment, while others have greater readiness in learning some peculiar art, God, by this variety commands his favour toward us, lest anyone should presume to arrogate to himself that which flows from His mere liberality. For whence is it that one is more excellent than another, but that in a common nature the grace of God is specially displayed in passing by many and thus proclaiming that it is under obligation to none."

— John Calvin, Book 2, Chapter 2:17.

"But we ought to consider, that, notwithstanding of the corruption of our nature, there is some room for divine grace, such grace as, without purifying it, may lay it under internal restraint. For did the Lord let every mind loose to wanton in its lusts, doubtless there is not a man who would not show that his nature is capable of all the crimes with which Paul charges it."

— John Calvin, Book 2, Chapter 3:3.

"Still, the surest and easiest answer to the objection is, that those are not common endowments of nature, but special gifts of God, which he distributes in divers forms, and, in a definite measure, to men otherwise profane. For which reason, we hesitate not, in common language, to say, that one is of a good, another of a vicious nature; though we cease not to hold that both are placed under the universal condition of human depravity. All we mean is that God has conferred on the one a special grace which he has not seen it meet to confer on the other. When he was pleased to set Saul over the kingdom, he made him as it were a new man."

— John Calvin, Book 2, Chapter 3:4.

"The reprobate believe God to be propitious to them, inasmuch as they accept the gift of reconciliation, though confusedly and without due discernment; not that they are partakers of the same faith or regeneration with the children of God; but because, under a covering of hypocrisy, they seem to have a principle of faith in common with them. Nor do I even deny that God illuminates their minds to this extent, that they recognize his grace; but that conviction he distinguishes from the peculiar testimony which he gives to his elect in this respect, that the reprobate never attain to the full result or to fruition. When he shows himself propitious to them, it is not as if he had truly rescued them from death, and taken them under his protection. He only gives them a manifestation of his present mercy. In the elect alone he implants the living root of faith, so that they persevere even to the end. Thus we dispose of the objection, that if God truly displays his grace, it must endure for ever. There is nothing inconsistent in this with the fact of his enlightening some with a present sense of grace, which afterwards proves evanescent."

— John Calvin, Book 3, Chapter 2:11.

"As by the revolt of the first man, the image of God could be effaced from his mind and soul, so there is nothing strange in His shedding some rays of grace on the reprobate, and afterwards allowing these to be extinguished."

— John Calvin, Book 3, Chapter 2:12.

"God is undoubtedly ready to pardon whenever the sinner turns. Therefore, he does not will his death, in so far as he wills repentance. But experience shows that this will, for the repentance of those whom he invites to himself, is not such as to make him touch all their hearts. Still, it cannot be said that he acts deceitfully; for though the external word only renders, those who hear it, and do not obey it, inexcusable, it is still truly regarded as an evidence of the grace by which he reconciles men to himself."

— John Calvin, Book 3, Chapter 24:15.

Herman Bavinck also traced this Doctrine back to Calvin in his article "Common Grace a Translation by Raymond C. Van Leeuwen" in the Calvin Theological Journal [35-36].

"Bavinck traced the origin of the doctrine of common grace to Calvin and based it on Scripture. Calvin considered common grace an aspect of God's all-encompassing providence by which he maintains human life and culture as well as the rest of creation for his own purposes (Inst. 2.2.3). Common grace maintains the goodness of creation in spite of humanity's radical depravity resulting from the fall. This grace is the source of all human virtue and accomplishment, even that of unbelievers who have not been regenerated by the salvine grace of God (Inst. 2.2.12-17)."

He later adds on (pg.36):

"Bavinck builds on Calvin, and in "Common Grace" he develops his theme in conscious opposition to the revival of Aquinas signaled by the 1879 encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*. He firmly rejects the Roman Catholic idea of grace as

something "superadded" to the natural life. In accordance with the Reformed tradition, he insists that common grace sustains the creation order while special (salvific) grace redeems, restores, and transforms creation and culture.⁴ Indeed, several scholars have argued that the idea that grace renews nature is the central theme in Bavinck's theology"

And on (pg.38):

"Bavinck's view of common grace articulates a theological worldview that provides a basis for dealing with fundamental problems of the twentieth century. It enables us to acknowledge the importance of creation and human culture as good gifts of God that not only form the arena of his redemptive activity but are themselves subject to redemption. Bavinck contends that world flight is not a suitable Christian option. He affirms human responsibility for culture and creation in the context of the Creator's ultimate sovereignty and Christ's redemption of all things. Science and scholarship, art and politics, domestic and public life all have their basis in common grace. Such grace sustains the creation order even while all things await renewal by God's salvific grace in Christ."

As I clearly demonstrated, the Reformers do in fact affirm "common grace" and championed it which I think can be summarized in the format that the 1924 CRC lays out which explicitly denies common grace being interlinked with "salvation" which appears to be the root of the disagreement.

The first point refutes your entire premise as it acknowledges that saving grace is only shown to the elect...

1. In addition to the >>>saving grace of God, shown only to those who are elected to eternal life, there is also a certain favor, or grace, of God shown to his creatures in general.<<<

This distinction is what we affirm when we speak of "common grace" and should help you to see the points made.