

## THE APPLICATION OF SALVATION

### I. Common Grace

#### A. The Nature of Common Grace

The term "common grace" is used by various writers in one of two meanings. Sometimes common grace means those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby He, without renewing the heart, exercises such a moral influence on man that sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civic righteousness is promoted. Other times common grace means those general blessings which God imparts to all men without distinction as He sees fit.

In the first sense of moral influence, common grace does not enable the sinner to exercise repentance or faith, or to please God. At best it affects only the externals of a person's life; and as such it can be, and always is, resisted by the unsaved.

In the second sense of general blessings, common grace benefits all mankind, the wicked and the righteous, and is an indirect result of Christ's atonement.

Charles Hedge, in treating this topic, writes:

The gospel is a system of grace. All its blessings are gratuitously bestowed; all is so ordered that in every step of the progress of redemption and in its consummation, the grace, or undeserved love of God, is conspicuously displayed. Nothing is given or promised on the ground of merit. Everything is an undeserved favour . . . . Hence it is that the greatest of all gifts secured by the work of Christ, that without which salvation had been impossible, the Holy Ghost, in the influence which He exerts on the minds of men, has in all ages and in all parts of the Church been designated as divine grace. A work of grace is the work of the Holy Spirit; the influence of the Spirit is conveyed or exercised. By common grace therefore, it meant that influence of the Spirit, which in a greater or less measure, is granted to all who hear the truth. By sufficient grace is meant such kind and degree of the Spirit's influence, as is sufficient to lead men to repentance, faith, and a holy life. By efficacious grace is meant such an influence of the Spirit as it certainly effectual in producing regeneration and conversion. By preventing grace is intended that operation of the Spirit on the mind which precedes and excites its efforts to return to God. By the *gratia gratum faciens* is meant the influence of the Spirit which renews or renders gracious. Cooperating grace is that influence of the Spirit which aids the people of God in all the exercises of the divine life. By habitual grace is meant the Holy Spirit as dwelling in believers; or, that permanent, imminent state of mind due to his abiding presence and power. Such is the established theological and Christian usage of this word. By grace, therefore, in this connection is meant the influence of the Spirit of God on the minds of men.

-- Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), vol. 2, pp. 654-655.