

Angus  
Stewart

# THE PSALMS

*versus*

"COMMON GRACE"



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*“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14).*

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## I.



# INTRODUCTION

**C**OMMON GRACE is, according to its theorists, a grace of God that is common: a grace of God for everybody, head for head, bar none, including the reprobate, those not elected nor redeemed nor effectually called in Jesus Christ. The advocates of common grace claim that God has grace, love and mercy for the reprobate, those whom God has eternally decreed not to save but to punish in the way of their sins.

There are many different doctrines of common grace, but all forms of common grace hold to two basic points. First, God has a favourable *attitude* towards the reprobate wicked, viewing them with grace and pity as objects of His lovingkindness and mercy. Second, all the good things which the reprobate wicked receive from God in this life come to them out of a love of God for them, as proofs of His grace and favour for them and instances of His blessing upon them.

Other advocates of common grace would go further, stating, third, that God *inwardly and graciously* restrains sin in the reprobate (contrary to the Bible's teaching on total depravity). Fourth, God inwardly and graciously enables them to do works which are partly good in His eyes (contra Gen. 6:5; Rom. 3:12).

Yet others would take common grace further, claiming, fifth, that believers are to be friends with unbelievers (contrary to the truth of the antithesis; Gen. 3:15; II Cor. 6:14-18). Sixth, Christians should cooperate with non-Christians in building the kingdom of God on earth (contra II Chron. 19:2; John 3:3).

Others add, seventh, that God empathises with the ungodly, entering into (so as to share) their feelings (contra Josh. 11:20; Lam. 2:2). Eighth, most advocates of common grace link it with the free offer: a purported earnest and passionate, yet always resisted, desire of God to save the reprobate (contra Matt. 11:25-27; Rom. 9:17-18, 21-23).

In this study, rather than canvassing the whole of Scripture, we shall consider only the teaching of the inspired Psalms, in order to reduce our field somewhat. We shall begin this study at the beginning of the Psalter.

## II.



### PSALM 1

**T**HE FIRST WORD of the first Psalm, in both Hebrew and English, is “blessed,” a key word in the debate over common grace. A “blessed” man (Ps. 1:1) is one blessed and made happy by God’s bringing him into living communion with Himself. That God *blesses* us means that He has a *favourable attitude of grace and pity* towards us, that He *inwardly and graciously restrains sin* in us and that He *enables us to do good works which are pleasing in His eyes* through Jesus Christ. The way of blessedness and happiness, for us as God’s people, is that of practising the antithesis—spiritual separation from the ungodly—no “walking,” “standing” or “sitting” in fellowship with them (v. 1). Verse 1 is contrary to the notion of many advocates of common grace that believers are to be friends with unbelievers and should cooperate with “non-Christians of good will” in building the kingdom of God on earth. Whereas verse 1 states, negatively, what the blessed man *does not* do, verse 2 sets forth, positively, his delight in, and meditation upon, God’s Word. Avoiding the wicked (v. 1) and feasting upon the holy Scriptures (v. 2), the faithful saint is likened to a well-watered, fruit-bearing tree (v. 3).

The second half of the first Psalm turns to the wicked (vv. 4-6), beginning with the simple, devastating statement: “The ungodly are not

so” (v. 4). Contrary to God’s people (vv. 1-2), the unconverted fellowship together in their sin and despise God’s Word. Whereas the godly man is “blessed” (v. 1), the “ungodly are *not so*” (4). God’s attitude towards them is not one of love and favour but of wrath. Jehovah does not work graciously in them to restrain sin and make their works partly righteous in His eyes. They bring forth no good “fruit” and do not “prosper” spiritually (v. 3). There is no common grace here!

Psalm 1:6 observes that “the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” Obviously, the omniscient God “knows” the ways of both believers and unbelievers, if “know” here simply means “be aware of intellectually.” This text is, therefore, saying that Jehovah “knows [with the intimate knowledge of love]” the “way” (i.e., lifestyle, behaviour) of His saints. The Hebrew parallelism of Psalm 1:6 teaches us that God does not “know” (i.e., love) the “way” (i.e., lifestyle, behaviour) of the wicked; He hates their “way” because the reprobate are totally depraved, as are all their works (Prov. 6:16-19; Rom. 3:10-18). Thus not only will the wicked be condemned in the great judgment day (Ps. 1:5) and be driven away like chaff before the wind (v. 4), but also God so detests their behaviour and lifestyle that even “the *way* of the ungodly shall perish” (v. 6)!

### III.



## PSALM 2

**P**SALM 2 provides an excellent refutation of common grace and what it is supposed to be able to do. The “heathen,” the “people,” the “kings of the earth” and the “rulers” (vv. 1-2) are the Jews and the Gentiles and their leaders, Herod and Pontius Pilate, according to Acts 4:25-28.

According to the common grace theory, the Roman empire and people with their earthly dominion, military supremacy, material prosperity, superb roads, developed jurisprudence and high level of civilization were greatly *blessed* by God. Whereas the pagan Romans had the most common grace *politically*, the unbelieving Jews supposedly had the most common grace *religiously* (through their external possession of the law and their physical descent from Abraham, etc.).

But what did the ungodly Romans and Jews do with all this alleged love of God for them and towards them and upon them and in them? Psalm 2 tells that they attacked Jehovah and “his anointed” (v. 2) or Messiah (from the Hebrew) or Christ (from the Greek) and nailed God’s incarnate Son to the cross! These supposed promoters of “natural law” (the Romans) and Old Testament law (the Jews) rejected God’s law and cast away His

“bands” and “cords” (v. 3). So much for the good works produced by common grace!

Did these wicked Jews and Gentiles thwart God’s purpose of saving His people and exalting his Son? No! “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (v. 6). Is there any divine love for these unbelievers who had received so many good things in God’s providence (not grace)? No! The Lord “laughs” at them and “derides” them (v. 4). He does not bless or speak good of, or to, them; He speaks to them “in his wrath” (v. 5). He is in no way pleased with them or their works; He vexes “them in his sore displeasure” (v. 5).

Christ’s crucifixion is followed by His resurrection (v. 7; Acts 13:33) and session at God’s right hand (Ps. 2:6) and rule over all nations (vv. 8-9). And what about Christ’s providential government of the reprobate wicked? Is it partly a rule of love for them and partly a rule of holy wrath against them? No, it is entirely the latter: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (v. 9). In theological terms, the elect are under Christ’s reign of grace; the reprobate are under His reign of power (not grace).

The call of the gospel goes out in Psalm 2: “trust” in Christ (v. 12), “be wise” and “be instructed” (v. 10). “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (v. 11). “Kiss the Son”—an act of homage and submission—otherwise you will “perish” under His anger and “wrath,” even when “kindled but a little” (v. 12).

Psalm 2 ends the way Psalm 1 begins, with an affirmation of the blessedness of God’s elect people: “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Ps. 2:12). Those who do not believe are not blessed but *cursed* (Gal. 3:6-14; Deut. 27:11-28:68).

## IV.



### PSALM 3

**P**SALM 3 is the first psalm that comes with a title: “A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.” This places this psalm firmly in the days of Absalom’s wicked rebellion against David, his father, King of Israel (II Sam. 15ff.).

In the opening verses of Psalm 3, David exclaims in amazement that “many” (vv. 1, 2) had turned against him and that they have “increased” (v. 1). The narrative in II Samuel also lays great emphasis on the huge scale of the rebellion against Israel’s rightful king (II Sam. 15:6, 10-13; 16:15; 17:11; 18:6-7; 19:8-10). David’s own flesh and blood, Absalom, led the coup and most of the nation had gone over to him. Ahithophel, David’s friend and chief counsellor, defected (15:12, 31) and there was Shimei, Saul’s relative, to curse David, whom he called a bloodthirsty son of Belial, and throw stones at him and his men (16:5-14). These are the “many” who have “increased” who “trouble” David and “rise up against” him (Ps. 3:1). “Many there be [not just among the surrounding pagan nations but in Israel, which professes to be the people of God, the only true church!] which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God” (v. 2).

Notice what David does not do. He does not give way to despair and blame God. Indeed, David understood that Absalom’s rebellion was

divine chastisement for his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah the Hittite (II Sam. 12:9-12). Instead of responding in unbelief and rage, David turns to Jehovah, the God of all comfort. He is the psalmist's "shield" to protect him and "the lifter up of [his] head" to encourage him (Ps. 3:3). Indeed, David calls the Lord "my glory" (v. 3) for "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (II Sam. 23:1) glories in God, even in these most trying of circumstances!

After confessing his love of Jehovah (Ps. 3:3), King David prays and is sure of an answer: "I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill" (v. 4). David has been forced to leave Jerusalem, fleeing before Absalom's advancing forces (II Sam. 15:13ff.), but he still has access by faith in the coming Messiah to God's "holy hill" (Ps. 3:4) in heaven to which Israel's lofty, earthly capital pointed.

With the rich consolation of Jehovah's covenant friendship (v. 3) and the assurance of answered prayer (v. 4), despite the threat of assassination or attack, David was able to do three (ordinarily mundane) things in peace and safety: lie down, sleep and awake (v. 5). How was this, David? Israel's king tells us: "for the Lord sustained me" (v. 5).

Rising next morning, many miles from his palace bed, David is physically and spiritually strengthened. Out of the holy fear of Almighty God, he is able to confess over against Absalom's rebellious hordes: "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about" (v. 6).

As David stirs himself from sleep, he beseeches God, as it were, to do the same: "Arise, O Lord" (v. 7)! Show that Thou art awake and fully engaged in the deliverance of Thy beloved servant! "Save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly" (v. 7)!

But what has all this to do with Jehovah's almighty, uncommon grace? We are coming to that now. Notice the psalmist's concluding summary: "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: thy blessing is upon thy people" (v. 8). God's blessing is upon His people, not the pagan Gentiles nor the unbelieving in Israel!

Notice David's reasoning. Salvation is God's sovereign prerogative (v. 8a) and God's salvation of David involves His destroying of David's

“ungodly” “enemies” in Israel who had rebelled against him (v. 7). Thus David adds, “thy blessing is upon thy people” (v. 8b).

Absalom was not one of God’s people. Aside from his cold-blooded murder of his half-brother Amnon (II Sam. 13:19-29), he had rebelled against his father, the king, and seized the throne. This was not only an egregious breaking of the fifth commandment; it was a frontal assault on the man after God’s own heart (I Sam. 13:14) who ruled over the Old Testament form of the kingdom of God and typified the coming Messiah, David’s son and Lord. As far as he was able, Absalom attacked the future Christ and His kingdom!

Ahithophel did not truly belong to the people of God either. His base treachery against his friend, David, is famous (cf. Ps. 41:9; 55:12-14), as is his wicked suicide when this proud man hanged himself because he could not bear it that for once “his counsel was not followed” (II Sam. 17:23). Ahithophel is the Old Testament equivalent of Judas, “the son of perdition” (John 17:12), who betrayed Christ (his professed friend), hanged himself and went “to his own place,” hell (Acts 1:25).

As the apostle explains, “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6). Some in ethnic Israel were carnal seed or “children of the flesh;” while others were the spiritual seed or “the children of the promise” (v. 8).

In His love and mercy, God sovereignly bestows His “salvation” and “blessing” upon His true, spiritual people (Ps. 3:8), whereas the “ungodly” in Israel are destroyed (v. 7). Though Absalom and his rebels possessed the (physical) throne of David, the (earthly) city of Jerusalem and the ark of the covenant in its tent, and though (outwardly) they were members in the visible church (Israel) as those circumcised and instructed in God’s law, none of these good things were blessings to them. God’s “blessing is upon [His] people” (v. 8), His true spiritual people who are “Israelite[s] indeed” (John 1:47) and “are of a clean heart” (Ps. 73:1). This is God’s sovereign, omnipotent, saving, uncommon grace in Jesus Christ which shields, and lifts up the heads of, the elect (Ps. 3:3) and punches the cheek bone and smashes the teeth of the “ungodly” reprobate (v. 7).

Philip the evangelist once asked the Ethiopian eunuch, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (Acts 8:30). Likewise, we ought to know the meaning of the inspired Psalms which exhort us, “Sing ye praises with

understanding” (Ps. 47:7). This study of the Psalms in connection with [un]common grace enables us to do just that, as we extol our covenant God for His matchless and efficacious uncommon grace through the crucified and risen Christ.

## V.



## PSALM 4

**I**N PSALM 4, the first psalm to refer to things musical in its heading, David beseeches Jehovah for mercy (v. 1) and deliverance from his enemies (vv. 2, 8). As the God of his righteousness (v. 1), the Almighty imputes righteousness to the Psalmist (justification) and infuses righteousness into him (sanctification) and vindicates him from the slander and lies of the wicked (v. 2).

Psalm 4 sharply distinguishes between two human parties. On the one hand are David, who sings and prays to the Lord for relief from distress (v. 1), and his “godly” associates (v. 3), the “us” of verse 6. On the other hand are the ungodly “sons of men” who castigate David with falsehoods (v. 2), the “them” referred to in verse 7.

The “sweet Psalmist of Israel” (II Sam. 23:1) lays this down as a basic principle: “But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly [but not him that is ungodly] for himself: the Lord will hear when I [but not the wicked] call unto him” (Ps. 4:3). The antithesis between the two seeds—the seed of the woman (Christ and those in Him) and the seed of the serpent (Satan and all unbelievers; Gen. 3:15)—is created by our covenant God in devoting us to Himself.

The “godly” (Ps. 4:3) receive “righteousness” and “mercy” (or grace) from God (1), plus “peace” and “safety” (v. 8), as well as answer to prayer (vv. 1, 3). The Psalmist also praises Jehovah for “Thou hast put gladness in my heart” (v. 7), joy being a fruit of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Gal. 5:22).

Notice that David knows “gladness” (Ps. 4:7) and “peace” (v. 8) in Jehovah, irrespective of his (adverse, earthly) circumstances. Moreover, his (spiritual) joy is greater than that of his ungodly enemies, even when they are prospering in this world: “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased” (v. 7).

Unlike the righteous, the ungodly receive only “corn and wine” (v. 7)—shorthand for all the earthly provisions God sovereignly gives them in His providence—but not “mercy” (v. 1) or “peace” (v. 8) which are for the “godly” whom “the Lord hath set apart ... for himself” (v. 3). Listen to the Reformed faith’s exposition of the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer:

“Give us this day our daily bread;” that is, be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body, that we may thereby acknowledge thee to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor industry, nor even thy gifts, can profit us *without thy blessing*; and therefore that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures, and place it alone in thee (*Heidelberg Catechism*, A. 125).

Since Jehovah loathes the reprobate ungodly (“the froward is abomination to the Lord;” Prov. 3:32), he receives no divine blessing with the earthly good gifts he receives from God (“The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just;” v. 33).

The “mercy” of the Lord in answer to “prayer” (Ps. 4:1) breaks through as “the light of [God’s] countenance [shining] upon us” (v. 6)—the “us” who belong to Christ (v. 6) and not the “them” who only receive earthly good things (v. 7). Whereas God “hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Cor. 4:6), the ungodly do not experience God’s gracious smile upon them through our Saviour’s cross, for “the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (Ps. 34:16).

## VI.



## PSALM 5

**P**SALM 5:4-6 reads:

For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.

Notice God's attitude towards the ungodly: hatred (v. 5) and abhorrence (v. 6). Jehovah's hatred and abhorrence are not merely of the sin but also of the sinner: "thou hatest all *workers* of iniquity" (v. 5) and "the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful *man*" (v. 6). Moreover, it is not just *some* particularly bad sinners, but "*all* workers of iniquity" that God hates (v. 5). God does *not* love the reprobate sinner but hate his sin; He hates the sin *and* the sinner (vv. 5-6).

The ground of God's hatred and abhorrence of reprobate sinners is their complete moral corruption or total depravity. Psalm 5 uses the words "wickedness," "evil," "foolish," "iniquity," "bloody" and "deceitful" (vv.

4-6) to describe the ungodly. Psalm 5:9, quoted in Romans 3:13 as proof of the total depravity of all fallen sinners outside of Jesus Christ, adds, “there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre.” Since God is the kind of God that He is—righteous, holy and just—and since man is totally depraved, God hates the wicked outside of Christ: “For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity” (Ps. 5:4-5).

So what about the theory of common grace? According to common grace, God *loves* the reprobate wicked. According to Psalm 5, God *hates* the reprobate wicked. Which are you going to believe?

Perhaps you think this is too strong, a “hard saying,” but Psalm 5 is the voice of God. It is sacred Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the Word of Jesus Christ who spoke by the Old Testament prophets (I Peter 1:11). Psalm 5, according to its title, was penned by David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel (II Sam. 23:1) and the man after God’s own heart (I Sam. 13:14). Psalm 5:4-6 is immediately preceded by David’s heart-felt petitions to his God (vv. 1-3) and immediately followed by his resolution to worship: “But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple” (v. 7). The truth of God’s hatred for the wicked (vv. 4-6) does not hinder David in prayer or worship, but helps him in prayer (vv. 1-3) and worship (v. 7).

David, the man after God’s own heart, professes particular grace, “mercy” to him and all the saints (v. 7), but not to the wicked whom God hates (v. 5). God views with “favour” and promises to “bless” the “righteous” (v. 12), whereas He abhors the ungodly (v. 6). Psalm 5 does not teach a universal love of God for all, but a particular love of God for His elect people and a holy hatred for the reprobate wicked (vv. 4-6). Psalm 5 denies *common* grace and teaches *uncommon* grace.

## VII.



## PSALM 6

**P**SALM 6 opens with a reference to chastisement (v. 1), which is a fruit of God’s love for His elect children: “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb. 12:6). Do you see the connection? Love—chastisement—sonship. Hebrews 12:7-8 explains that those who are *not* chastened are illegitimate and “not sons.” Christ calls such people Satan’s sons: “Ye are of your father the devil” (John 8:44). Moreover, if those who are not chastened are not God’s children, could it really be that He *loves* them? Surely, if God loves and therefore chastises His sons, then those who are not His sons, and whom He does not chastise, are not loved by Him. Consider in this connection Proverbs 13:24: “He that spareth his rod [i.e., does not chasten] *hateth* his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.”

Psalm 6 speaks of God’s severe chastening of David: his bones were “vexed” (v. 2) and his soul was “sore vexed” (v. 3). He groaned and wept much (vv. 6-7), as he felt the pangs of “death” (v. 5). Yet knowing that the God who chastened him surely loved him, David pleads for Jehovah’s “mercy” (v. 2) and “[covenant] mercies” (v. 4). But whereas the Psalmist, knowing God’s grace towards him, is confident of answered prayer for

himself (vv. 8-9), his wicked “enemies” will surely be “ashamed” (v. 10), for this, too, is according to God’s sovereign will and just desire.

This shame ultimately is in hell, and so verse 8 (“Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity”) is alluded to by Christ: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into *everlasting fire*” (Matt. 25:41). Notice the striking words that precede Christ’s quoting of Psalm 6:8 in the Sermon on the Mount: “*I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matt. 7:23). As the omniscient, universal judge, the Lord Jesus, of course, has an intellectual knowledge of everybody. Thus the word “knew” in Christ’s words of banishment to the reprobate wicked on the judgment day must, and does, refer to the *intimate knowledge of love* (cf. Gen. 4:1; Amos 3:2; II Tim. 2:19). The Lord “*never knew*” or loved the reprobate—not before God formed the world, not during their lives, not after they died. This is Christ’s word to them: “*I never knew [or loved] you*” (Matt. 7:23)!

God loves all His adopted children and therefore chastises us (Ps. 6:1) out of love for us (Heb. 12:5-8) with this glorious purpose and result: “that we might be partakers of his holiness” (v. 10). So let us hold fast to God’s particular, uncommon, efficacious grace and not “despise” or “faint” under His loving chastisement of us (v. 5)!

## VIII.



## PSALM 7

**P**SALM 7 was penned by David, as the heading informs us, in response to “the words of Cush the Benjamite,” whom I take to be the same as Shimei who cursed and railed on Israel’s king when he fled Jerusalem upon Absalom’s rebellion (II Sam. 16:5-14). Psalm 7 applies to all of David’s “enemies” (v. 6) and, indeed, the (reprobate) wicked in general.

In this psalm, Israel’s king appeals to God as his deliverer (vv. 1-2), judge (vv. 3-9) and defence (vv. 10-17): “O Lord, don’t let the ungodly tear me in pieces (vv. 1-2). If I really am guilty of the terrible things with which Shimei charges me (vv. 3-4; II Sam. 16:7-8)—though I’m not (Ps. 7:4b)—then let the enemy kill me and trample my honour in the dust (v. 5). Awake, Lord, and judge my enemies (v. 6) and so Thy people will draw near Thee in praise (v. 7). Vindicate me and all the ‘just,’ O Jehovah, and destroy the wicked (vv. 8-9). Thou art ‘my defence’ (v. 10) and Thou art ‘angry with the wicked every day’ (v. 11). The sin of the wicked will boomerang upon him (vv. 14-16) and Thou hast already prepared the instruments of his destruction (vv. 12-13). Therefore I will sing praise to my Lord (v. 17).”

“God is angry with the wicked every day” (v. 11) is especially relevant to the truth of uncommon grace. “With the wicked” is in italics in the Authorised Version but it gives the correct sense, for the next verse continues, “If he [i.e., the wicked] turn not,” Jehovah will destroy him (v. 12). The terribly vivid imagery of God’s punishment of the ungodly—His sharpening the sword of judgment and bending His bow and filling it with arrows against him, yea, His preparation of the “instruments of death”—is realised in Jehovah’s cutting off the wicked and casting him into everlasting hell (vv. 12-13).

It is true that God is “angry” with the elect before their conversion. We “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph. 2:3), for the Holy One of Israel saw our totally depraved natures and all our thoughts, words and deeds were 100% sinful. We experienced this wrath too in the pangs of our guilty consciences and the “bondage” of the “fear of death” (Heb. 2:15). Yet God also loved us with His infinite and irresistible love in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world (Jer. 31:3; Eph. 1:4). But prior to God’s giving us repentance and faith, we had no knowledge or experience of His love; all that we knew or experienced was His anger against us for our sins.

God can even be said to be angry with His believing people when we fall into sin or continue impenitently in it for a time. This was David’s experience in Psalm 32:3-5 and in Psalm 6:1: “O Lord, rebuke me not in *thine anger*, neither chasten me in thy *hot displeasure*.” Our heavenly Father is angry with His (spiritual) children when we disobey, as an earthly father is angry with his (physical) children when they disobey. In His holy “anger” and “displeasure,” God “rebukes” and “chastens” us, to use the language of Psalm 6:1. Hebrews 12:6, quoting Proverbs 3:12, explains that God’s “chastening” of us as “sons” proceeds from His “love.” In other words, God’s love for His believing children reveals itself in anger when we walk in sin. He loves us so much and He so seeks our holiness that He chastises us—sometimes severely—for our transgressions to bring us to repentance and so produce in us the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:5-11).

The “wicked” (Ps. 7:11) who “turn not” (v. 12) and endure eternal torments (vv. 12-13; cf. 11:5-6) are the reprobate wicked. God is angry with them in His fiery indignation “every day” (7:11), from the day of their

conception and the day of their birth to the day of their death, and every day in between. God is indignant with the reprobate wicked as he celebrates his birthdays or enjoys his holidays or rejoices on his wedding day or in the births of his children. God is angry with him on a Sunday, whether he spends the day playing golf or watching TV or even going to church! Nor are we to think that God is angry with the reprobate wicked for *some time* or *part* of “every day” (v. 11). God is indignant with each and every one of them from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same. Yea, He is angry with them all day every day, even when they sleep.

As Paul states in Romans 9:13, quoting Malachi 1:3, “Esau have I hated.” Isaac’s older son was not only hated by God all day every day; God hated him before the foundation of the world (in the way of his sin), for Romans 9:13 in its context is dealing with God’s unconditional and eternal election and reprobation. Moreover, God’s sovereign hatred of Esau (v. 13) and His sovereign hardening of Pharaoh (vv. 17-18) are not merely references to these two men only. These principles apply to all the reprobate (vv. 13-24).

Since God is angry with the reprobate wicked every day (Ps. 7:11), it is not a surprise but entirely appropriate that He destroys them with His sharp sword and taut bow (vv. 12-13). In fact, one can argue the other way round: Given the terrible and everlasting torment that awaits the reprobate wicked (vv. 12-13), of course, God is angry with them even while they live on earth (v 11)!

God’s punishment of the reprobate wicked is entirely fair for they conceive, travail with and give birth to iniquity and falsehood (v. 14). This is their progeny! Also there is poetic justice, for the wicked falls into the pit he made for others (v. 15) and his trouble falls on his own head (v. 16).

Justice is an intrinsic characteristic of the Almighty; He judges (vv. 8, 11) and exercises judgment (v. 6). He is “the righteous God” (v. 9) and His perpetual indignation with the reprobate wicked (v. 11), issuing in their everlasting destruction (vv. 12-13) for their sins (v. 14), is “according to his righteousness” (v. 17), His unswerving commitment to Himself as His own perfect standard. Moreover, Jehovah’s indignation against, and punishment of, the reprobate is ground for holy worship, as David concludes Psalm 7: “I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness:

and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high” (v. 17). There is no “common grace” for the reprobate here!

## IX.



## PSALM 8

**T**HE STARTING point for David's devotions in Psalm 8 is the sky, the sky at night (whereas Psalm 19:1-6 treats the sky by day), for it is only when the sun is down that we can see "the moon and the stars" (8:3). The almighty wisdom manifest in "the work of [God's] fingers" in outer space (v. 3) leads the psalmist to marvel at God's careful attention to puny man (v. 4) whom He crowns with glory (v. 5), giving him dominion (v. 6) over the living creatures of the land, air and sea (vv. 7-8). "O Lord our Lord," holy David exclaims, "how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (vv. 1, 9). Jehovah's "glory [is] above the heavens" (v. 1), far higher and greater than even the marvellous and enormous expanse of the second heaven, outer space.

But what has all this to do with the false theory of common grace? Not much; rather, not much *directly*. But in raising the issue of the right interpretation and understanding of the moon and the stars (v. 3), the doctrine of man (vv. 4-5) and his lordship over the earth (vv. 6-8), and hence the glory of God's great name (vv. 1, 9), as well as in characterizing those who grasp this truth (v. 2), the issue of common grace comes up. For common grace is a prominent factor in the unbelieving reinterpretation of the creation.

Let me explain. Over the last two centuries, the Bible's teaching of a young earth and the creation of man on the sixth day as head, under God, of the planet has been attacked and undermined through unbelieving science: uniformitarian geology, evolutionism and the big bang. As these views infiltrate seminaries, pulpits and pews in apostate and apostatising churches, the question inevitably arises, How can we reconcile our evolutionary beliefs with the Bible (especially Genesis 1-3)?

The false philosophy of common grace has boldly ridden to the rescue (cf., e.g., the report of the Committee on Creation and Science accepted at the Christian Reformed Church of N. America Synod of 1991)! The (flawed) reasoning is easy to grasp. Since God loves everybody and since this is *God's* love and, therefore, powerful and transformative, God's love must result in changing everyone somewhat for the better and so making them something less than—and maybe a lot less than!—totally depraved. All scientists are, therefore, (at least partially) good and so they are really seeking after the truth, the truth about origins too: the origins of man, life, the earth and the universe.

These scientists (at least, most of them) tell us that man evolved from the primeval slime pond and our planet, solar system and universe are the result of an explosion many billions of years ago. Common grace “baptizes” this folly into (various forms of) *theistic* evolutionism, the notion of a “god of the gaps” who used evolution to make man and the world. Genesis 1-3 and the succeeding chapters, as well as many other parts of the Bible, such as the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8-11), Christ's teaching on marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:4-6), the prohibition of women in church office (I Tim. 2:11-15), etc., must be “reinterpreted” as myths or mere morality stories. The biblical and Reformed doctrine of the inspiration, authority, inerrancy, perspicuity and sufficiency of Scripture is denied (II Tim. 3:16-17; *Belgic Confession* 2-7; *Westminster Confession* 1) and further departures are inevitable.

Ah, the marvel of common grace! It not only removes the offence of the gospel (the *absolute* sovereignty of God) and facilitates false ecumenism with Arminians (by teaching that God loves everybody and wants to save everybody); it also can be used to justify evolutionism!

Unlike liberal theologians with the glaucoma of common grace and the warped spectacles of evolutionism, David has 20/20 vision through

spiritual, believing eyes and the glasses of Scripture. He knew that the holy God of justice does not love the ungodly reprobate: “thou hatest all workers of iniquity” (Ps. 5:5); “the wicked ... his soul hateth” (11:5). The psalmist meditated upon and cleaved to Scripture and not the vain counsels of the ungodly (1:1-2; 2:1-3), for God’s “word is true from the beginning” (119:160).

In this light (including Genesis 1), David surveyed the glorious night sky with its heavenly bodies (Ps. 8:3). The immense expanse of God’s work on the fourth day (Gen. 1:14-19) dwarfed tiny man made on the sixth day (vv. 26-31), compelling David to exclaim, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Ps. 8:4). Next he, believing the truth of the first chapter of the Bible (Gen. 1:26-31), recalled God’s good gift to man, his vicegerent, of dominion over the earth (Ps. 8:5-8). Thus we understand and appreciate David’s entirely appropriate response in the opening and concluding lines of Psalm 8: “O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (1, 9).

But who makes this glorious confession? Not many of the high and mighty of this world (I Cor. 1:26). Jehovah has “ordained strength” or “perfected praise” “out of the mouth of babes and sucklings” (Ps. 8:2; Matt. 21:16)! Covenant children—not unbelieving astronomers or theologians—and humble adults with a child-like faith understand the heavens in the light of the Word and worship their Creator by sovereign, uncommon grace alone! This is God’s means to “still [or silence] the enemy and the avenger” (Ps. 8:2) who pervert and deny the truth of Jehovah’s creation, especially here of the fourth (v. 3), fifth (v. 8) and sixth (vv. 4-7) days (Gen. 1:14-31)!

This truth of creation is inseparably joined to the truth of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, for He is the ideal man and the second Adam who is the head of the creation, as Hebrews 2:6-10 (citing Psalm 8:4-6) teaches. And the “babes and sucklings” who glorify their Creator (v. 2) also worship Christ in His temple (Matt. 21:15-16)!

## X.



## PSALM 9

**P**SALM 9 answers the question, What will happen to the (reprobate) wicked? What will Jehovah do to them? “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (v. 17; cf. vv. 3b, 5, 15). The psalmist affirms repeatedly that this is justice, divine justice: “thou satest in the throne judging right” (v. 4b; cf. 7-8).

David declares, “The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth” (v. 16a). The believer’s saving knowledge of God includes knowing Him as the righteous judge. Jehovah reveals Himself as such in His Word and in this light we understand His judgments in history. “And,” the Psalmist adds, “they that know thy name [i.e., the glorious revelation of Thyself, including Thy holy justice] will put their trust in thee” (v. 10a).

The believing response of the individual saint to God’s righteous judgments, His “marvellous works,” is adoration: “I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High” (vv. 1-2). Concerning God’s just “doings,” the church cries out, “Sing praises to the Lord, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings” (v. 11).

Psalm 9 concludes with the psalmist's prayer that God punish the ungodly: "Arise, O Lord; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight. Put them in fear, O Lord: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah" (vv. 19-20).

In order to understand more fully why the people of God earnestly pray, and worship the Lord, for His righteous judgment of the wicked, we must grasp the truth that the salvation of the elect church goes hand in hand with the destruction of the reprobate ungodly. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. *For* the needy shall not alway be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever" (vv. 17-18). Notice the italicised "For" (v. 18), giving a reason why Jehovah punishes the wicked: to deliver His "needy" people from them (v. 18)!

Our Father in heaven answers the prayers of His saints who are "oppressed" (v. 9) and troubled (vv. 9, 13) by the ungodly (v. 13), for He does not forget (vv. 12, 18) nor forsake (v. 10) those who "trust in" and "seek" Him (v. 10). Jehovah's "judgment" (v. 16) of the wicked (vv. 3-6, 15-17) is thus the "salvation" of the righteous (v. 14). This, David explains, is "mercy" or grace for God's people (v. 13) but not mercy or grace to the reprobate, for the Almighty in His mercy and grace saves His elect church and justly destroys the ungodly (143:12).

Psalm 136 is similar. In His eternal "mercy" (to Israel), Jehovah slew the firstborn of Egypt (to whom this was not mercy) and brought out His people with a "strong hand" (vv. 10-12). It was the everlasting "mercy" of the Most High to Israel which drowned "Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea" (to whom this was not mercy), whereas the Old Testament church passed through on dry land (vv. 13-15). Likewise "mercy" to Israel meant that they received the "heritage" of trans-Jordan, but Sihon and Og and their people (to whom this was not mercy) were slaughtered and lost their land (vv. 17-22).

## XI.



## PSALM 10

**W**HEREAS PSALM 9 is a song of thanksgiving for God’s righteous judgment of the heathen, Psalm 10 is a lament concerning the wicked and their deeds (vv. 2-12): “Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?” (v. 1). This inspired hymn concludes with the prayer that the Lord would “arise,” “lift up [His] head” and “forget not the humble [who are persecuted by the ungodly]” (v. 12), which petitions are enforced with arguments (v. 14) and uttered with confidence (vv. 16-18). Neither Psalm 9 nor 10 are likely to be amongst people’s favourites from this, the longest book in the Bible, but both are certainly instructive and “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (II Tim. 3:16).

Psalm 10:3 refers to “the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth.” Thus the Holy One of Israel despises, contemns and abhors the greedy or covetous man. Various commentators reverse the subject of the verb, making the verse read, “the covetous abhor the Lord.” Though this is a possible reading of the Hebrew, there is no need to demur from the reading in our Authorized Version, followed by such commentators as Matthew Henry, William S. Plumer and C. H. Spurgeon.

Moreover, the same verb is used of God's attitude towards apostate Israelites in Deuteronomy 32:19: "And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters." Many texts in holy Scripture pronounce that God abhors, abominates, hates and loathes the reprobate wicked. "And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you" (Lev. 26:30). "For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God" (Deut. 25:16; cf. 18:12). "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished" (Prov. 16:5; cf. 3:32; 6:16-19; 11:20; 17:15; 22:14). "Behold, ye [idols] are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you" (Isa. 41:24). "Mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against me: therefore have I hated it" (Jer. 12:8). "All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house" (Hos. 9:15). "Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me" (Zech. 11:8). "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13; cf. Mal. 1:2-3).

The ground for God's righteous abhorrence of the ungodly is their total depravity, as Psalm 10:2-11 explains so copiously: pride (vv. 2, 4), persecuting the innocent (vv. 2, 8-10), boasting (v. 3), atheism (vv. 4, 11), self-sufficiency (v. 6) and evil speech (v. 7). Romans 3, which contains Scripture's greatest delineation of the utter wickedness of fallen man, even quotes Psalm 10:7: "whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Rom. 3:14).

Given the wicked's hatred of the true and living God (Ps. 10:4, 11, 13) and His people (vv. 2, 8-10, 14, 18), it is no wonder that the eternal and righteous "King" (v. 16) abhors them (vv. 3; 5:6) in this world and the next. Thus He punishes them "in His just judgment temporally and eternally" (*Heidelberg Catechism*, A. 10), in answer to His people's prayers (Ps. 10:17-18): "Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man" (v. 15a)! What now is left of a supposed universal love of God for the reprobate?

## XII.



## PSALM 11

**L**IKE PSALM 5, Psalm 11 opposes the idea that God loves everybody, including the reprobate—the core position of common grace. The key verses are 3-7:

If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.

God's attitude towards the ungodly is that of hatred: "the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul *hateth*" (v. 5). When it says that God's "soul" hates them, it means *all that God is*. He hates them in His inmost

being, so to speak. Moreover, God hates not just the sin, but the sinner: “the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth” (v. 5).

We are also told the ground for God’s hatred of the wicked. Jehovah hates them (v. 5) and will destroy them (v. 6), “For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness” (v. 7). Jehovah’s perfect righteousness and justice blaze against ungodly rebels. He is the holy and just One; therefore “the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth” (v. 5).

God’s hatred of the ungodly in time issues in their terrible punishment in hell: “Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup” (v. 6). This is the ultimate and final expression of His abhorrence of the wicked: their everlasting agony.

Psalm 11 speaks of the reprobate wicked, for those whom God hates (v. 5) He will punish in hell (v. 6). The elect, prior to their conversion, live in sin. But it is not true to say that God hates them, even when they were in unbelief. God eternally loved His people in Christ (Rom. 9:13). Therefore, He brings them all to repentance (Jer. 31:3). We are under His wrath prior to our conversion (Eph. 2:3), but He never hated us, for His hatred is His resolute determination to thrust away from Himself and punish everlastingly.

According to the title, David penned Psalm 11. He is being persecuted by the ungodly in Israel, probably under Saul or Absalom. He asks, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (v. 3). Righteousness and justice are the “foundations” of God’s kingdom on earth. When these are subverted and undermined by wicked leaders so that the saints are persecuted, what can the righteous do? So David recalls the heavenly foundations of God’s church and covenant. No matter what wicked church leaders do, God is holy, reigning in glory; He sees all. “The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men” (v. 4). His rule is perfectly just. He loves and tests the righteous (vv. 5, 7) but He hates the wicked (v. 5), whom He will cast into hell (v. 6). This is the moral foundation of the church and the universe: God’s holy love of His saints in Christ and His righteous hatred of the ungodly.

You see how common grace attacks the foundations? Common grace says that God loves the reprobate wicked. David, do you hear that? God

loves Saul (or Absalom) who is hunting you as a partridge on the hills and seeking to kill you (vv. 1-2)! But what about God's holiness and righteousness which He loves (v. 7)? What of His hatred of the wicked with all His "soul" (v. 5)? Common grace puts the world out of kilter; the foundations are moved! For God is not perfectly righteous, if He loves the reprobate who are wholly sinful.

Sadly, many Christians believe in common grace: God loves everybody, there is good in everybody (contra total depravity), God approves of some or much of the world's activities (contra Prov. 21:4) and Christians should see moral good in just about everything that the wicked do. Thus there is good in the higher critics and their work, though they undermine the authority and inerrancy of Holy Scripture. Because of common grace, we can accept the ideas of the evolutionists (i.e. big bang cosmology, uniformitarian geology and macro-evolution from slime to humans), for they are good people, honestly searching for the truth (contra Eph. 2:1-3). The theories of secular psychologists on guilt, family relationships, etc., can be embraced and X-rated movies can be watched because of the powerful operations of common grace, some even dare argue.

Even sodomy! If God loves everybody, then God loves homosexuals—just as they are. There is some moral good in them and so we can learn from them, for they show us true love too. This line of reasoning regarding sodomy has been embraced by many in the churches in the Netherlands, the home country of Abraham Kuyper, the patron saint of common grace, as well as Kuyper's disciples in Toronto, Canada, etc. The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in N. America, which in 1924 expelled Herman Hoeksema, justified allowing a lesbian group, singing about lesbianism, at the CRC's Calvin College on the basis of common grace (2002). Church of England bishops argue for homosexual church members and clergy using common grace: God loves homosexuals; they are in His image. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, believing that God loves all sinners and under pressure from both homosexuals and political correctness both within and without the denomination, produced a "fudged" and compromised document on sodomy at its 2007 General Assembly.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see <https://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/pciandsodomy.htm>.

If you deny that God hates the wicked and maintain that He loves them, you have destroyed the moral foundations of the church (Jehovah's righteous and discriminating love for His people only in Jesus Christ) and the church is already falling. The cracks are appearing and will grow—even if this is not admitted or wanted.

### XIII.



## PSALM 69

**A**LL AGREE that Psalm 69 is a messianic psalm. Verse 9a (“the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up”) is quoted in John 2:17 with reference to Jesus’ first cleansing the temple. Verse 9b (“the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me”) is cited by Paul in Romans 15:3 regarding Christ’s sufferings. Verse 25 (“Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents”) is quoted by Peter in Acts 1:20 against Judas, who betrayed our Lord. Verse 21 is alluded to in all four gospel accounts of Christ’s suffering on the cross (Matt. 27:48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:28-30).

Read Christ’s amazing prayers to God (Ps. 69:22-28). “Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap” (v. 22). There is no common grace here! The physical good things of food and drink which are served at the “table” are not given to the reprobate wicked in love; they are given in God’s judgment, as a “snare” and a “trap” (v. 22). Jesus prays for the spiritual blindness of His reprobate enemies: “Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake” (v. 23). Psalm 69:22-23 is quoted in Romans 11:9-10.

Psalm 69 opposes the free offer, an alleged desire of God to save the reprobate. In verse 24, Christ prays that the wicked be punished in hell: “Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.” In verse 27, Jesus prays that they not be justified and forgiven: “Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness.” In verse 28, our Lord prays that they have no part in the roll of heaven: “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.” Christ’s prayers are only for the elect: “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine” (John 17:9). Christ’s prayers are only against the reprobate (Ps. 69:22-28).

Like Psalm 22, Psalm 69 is a song of the cross. Christ’s petitions to God (vv. 22-28) come just after verses in which He is reproached by His enemies (vv. 19-20), left without comforters (v. 20) and given vinegar to drink on the cross (v. 21). This passage teaches the biblical and Reformed doctrine of particular atonement. Especially since Jesus prays for the destruction of the reprobate (vv. 22-28), including Judas (v. 25; Acts 1:20), while He was on the cross, He did not die for everybody. As He bears God’s wrath against the sins of His people, Christ opposes the notion that God wants to save everybody (Ps. 69:23-24, 27-28). While suffering hellish agonies on behalf of His church, Christ even made time to pray against the reprobate wicked and oppose the error of common grace (v. 22). Thus Psalm 69 teaches Christ’s particular atonement, particular intercession and particular grace for the elect alone. It even presents Christ praying against common grace and the free offer as He is crucified (vv. 22-28).

## XIV.



## PSALM 73

**A**SAPH OBSERVED “the prosperity of the wicked” (v. 3). They enjoy good health (v. 4), experience little hardship in life (v. 5), “increase in riches” (v. 12) and “have more than heart could wish” (v. 7). Yet they are draped with pride and clothed with violence (v. 6) and they “speak loftily” (v. 8) and “set their mouth against the heavens” (v. 9), asking “How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?” (v. 11).

Asaph was jealous of them: “I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (v. 3). Listen to his lament: “Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning” (vv. 13-14). “I seek to follow the Lord,” reasoned Asaph, “but all I receive is daily chastening. Why don’t I prosper and grow wealthy? Why should I bother living a godly life?” He nearly apostatized: “But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped” (v. 2)!

What was Asaph’s problem? He believed in common grace. Asaph thought that the material prosperity of the wicked meant that God loved them and blessed them, and, since he was not wealthy like them, he was not loved or blessed by God—at least not as much as he should be.

Notice *where* Asaph's problem was resolved: "I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end" (v. 17). He began to think straight again when he met with the Holy One in His dwelling place. This happens today when foolish Christians envious at the prosperous wicked and/or confused by the false doctrine of common grace come to believe the teaching of faithful churches concerning God's *uncommon* grace—His sovereign, particular and irresistible grace in the cross of Jesus Christ alone.

What was it that Asaph came to understand? "their end" (v. 17), where they were headed: eternal punishment in hell.

"Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (vv. 18-19).

The ungodly are like men walking on ice or "slippery places" (v. 18). All the good things that they receive from God in His providence (health, money, well-paying jobs, big cars, fine houses) are so many weights that they carry on the ice, making it all the easier to slip and fall into destruction. Notice, too, that it is God Himself who pushes them over and throws them into hell: "*thou* castedst them down into destruction" (v. 18). It all happens "in a moment!" (v. 19). How fearful!

Asaph now understood that their earthly prosperity did not prove that God loves them and blesses them. Instead, Jehovah "despises" them (v. 20)! The Most High sets them in slippery places until He shoves them and they fall into the bottomless pit. "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (v. 19).

When Asaph came to his senses, he felt ashamed of his former unbelief and stupidity: "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee" (vv. 21-22).

Asaph's faith is renewed and he testifies of God's goodness to him. No matter if he is rich or poor, God is graciously present with him (v. 23). This is Asaph's living hope: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (v. 24). Listen to his wonderful confession of trust and hope in the Lord: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (vv. 25-26).

The opening verse of the Psalm sums it all up: “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart” (v. 1). Jehovah’s goodness to Israel is His love, favour and grace towards them in Jesus Christ, irrespective of worldly wealth or poverty. Israel is further defined as those who “are of a clean heart” (v. 1) and not the prosperous wicked in Israel who “perish” (v. 27) and whom Asaph used to envy (v. 3). Christian ministers and all Jehovah’s people should emulate Asaph by drawing near to God in order to “declare all [His] works” (v. 28), including His work of providence in His justice (not grace) towards the prosperous wicked and His righteous destruction of them (v. 27).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more on Psalm 73, I would strongly recommend Prof. David Engelsma’s fine book, *Prosperous Wicked and Plagued Saints* (available from the CPRC Bookstore for £6.60, inc. P & P—<http://www.cprf.co.uk/bookstore/prosperouswicked.htm>), as the best and most thorough exposition of Psalm 73 that I have read.

## XV.



## PSALM 92

**T**HE SAME point made in Psalm 73 is stated more briefly in Psalm 92:5-9. The wicked are flourishing, springing up like grass (v. 7): growing tall and green; growing fast; filled with life and vitality; healthy, beautiful and secure. Surely, common grace reckons, this is a proof and demonstration of God's love for the ungodly: "When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; *it is because God loves them and is gracious to them and is blessing them.*"

But what saith the Scripture? "When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; *it is that they shall be destroyed for ever*" (v. 7). This is God's intention and purpose and goal when He gives His enemies material prosperity. He is preparing them for hell: "it is that they shall be destroyed for ever" (v. 7). "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). Tremble before Him! "For, lo, thine enemies, O Lord, for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered" (Ps. 92:9). You who are unbelieving, turn to Jesus Christ or you will perish everlastingly!

Those who do not see God's purpose and intention in giving good things to the wicked—namely, their eternal destruction—are spiritually

senseless and ignorant: “A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this” (v. 6; cf. Ps. 73:22).

But the righteous who believe God’s Word, praise Him for His wisdom in destroying the wicked through their earthly prosperity: “O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep” (Ps. 92:5). In rejecting the false explanation of the prosperity of the wicked that is offered by the theory of common grace (v. 7), we justify the omnipotent, righteous, wise and eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: “But thou, Lord, art most high for evermore” (v. 8).

## XVI.



## PSALM 145

**G**OD'S "TENDER MERCIES are over *all his works*," according to Psalm 145:9. Advocates of "common grace" reckon that "all [God's] works" here refer to everybody head for head, including the reprobate. But immediately the next verse declares, "*All thy works* shall praise thee" (v. 10a). The reprobate do not praise God, and so they cannot be the objects of God's "tender mercies" (v. 9). According to Hebrew parallelism, "thy saints shall bless thee" (v. 10b) defines *God's works* here as His holy people created by His sovereign grace in Jesus Christ (cf. Isa. 19:25; 29:23; 45:11; 60:21; 64:8; Eph. 2:10), the citizens of the gracious kingdom of God, the subject of Psalm 145.

Let us have the Hebrew parallelism of Psalm 145:9-10 clearly before us:

[v. 9a] The Lord is good to *all*:

[v. 9b] and his tender mercies are over *all his works*.

[v. 10a] *All thy works* shall praise thee, O Lord;

[v. 10b] and *thy saints* shall bless thee.

“All” (v. 9a) and “all [God’s] works” (vv. 9b, 10a) and God’s “saints” (v. 10b) refer to the same group, God’s holy people who are new creatures in Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10). The eternal, unchangeable and faithful Jehovah is good to “all” of them (Ps. 145:9a) and they are the objects of His covenantal “tender mercies” (v. 9b). Knowing God’s goodness and tender mercies, all of His holy people “praise” (v. 10a) and “bless” (v. 10b) Him, and “speak of the glory of [His] kingdom, and talk of [His] power” (v. 11).

Those unfamiliar with Hebrew parallelism should consider that all of the twenty-one verses of Psalm 145 say essentially the same thing in their two “halves:”

[v. 1] I will extol thee, my God, O king;  
and I will bless thy name for ever and ever.

[v. 2] Every day will I bless thee;  
and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.

[v. 3] Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;  
and his greatness is unsearchable.

[v. 4] One generation shall praise thy works to another,  
and shall declare thy mighty acts.

[v. 5] I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty,  
and of thy wondrous works.

[v. 6] And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts:  
and I will declare thy greatness.

[v. 7] They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great  
goodness,  
and shall sing of thy righteousness.

[v. 8] The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion;  
slow to anger, and of great mercy.

[v. 9] The Lord is good to all:  
and his tender mercies are over all his works.

[v. 10] All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord;  
and thy saints shall bless thee.

[v. 11] They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom,  
and talk of thy power;

[v. 12] To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts,  
and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.

[v. 13] Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

[v. 14] The Lord upholdeth all that fall,  
and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.

[v. 15] The eyes of all wait upon thee;  
and thou givest them their meat in due season.

[v. 16] Thou openest thine hand,  
and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

[v. 17] The Lord is righteous in all his ways,  
and holy in all his works.

[v. 18] The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him,  
to all that call upon him in truth.

[v. 19] He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him:  
he also will hear their cry, and will save them.

[v. 20] The Lord preserveth all them that love him:  
but all the wicked will he destroy.

[v. 21] My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord:  
and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

Notice that Psalm 145 opens by extolling the ever-blessed God as “king” (v. 1). Four times this psalm uses the word “kingdom” (v. 11-13) and once it refers to His “dominion” which “endureth through all generations” (v. 13). God’s “kingdom” is glorious, majestic and everlasting (v. 11-13). It is the topic of conversation and the subject of divine praise for “all his works” (vv. 9b, 10a), that is, his “saints” (10b) who “speak of,” “talk of” and “make known” (vv. 11-12) the “glory” of God’s kingdom, yea, its “glorious majesty” (vv. 11-12). In this kingdom, God’s “power” and “mighty acts” (vv. 11-12) are known and revered. Similarly, Jehovah’s “works,” “mighty acts,” “wondrous works” and “terrible acts” (vv. 4-6) are also in the service of the “king” (v. 1) and His kingdom (vv. 11-13) and are so many reasons for the church of all ages to worship Him (vv. 4-6): “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (v. 4). We gladly remember God’s “great goodness” and “sing” of His “righteousness” (v. 7). We bless Him for his ethical perfections: “The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger of great mercy” (v. 8). This is seen in Jehovah’s government of His “everlasting kingdom” (v. 13), for He “upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down” (v. 14) and He “is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth” (v. 18). Therefore He fulfills the desire of, hears the cry of, and saves those “that fear him” (v. 19) and provides food for all, to serve the interests of His kingdom (vv. 15-16). Thus in the whole of Psalm 145, David (preface) and “all God’s works,” that is His “saints” (vv. 9-10), praise God the king for the mighty acts and glorious majesty and tender mercies shown in setting up and maintaining His kingdom. This is the same kingdom that Jesus Christ preached in His public ministry and established in the blood of His cross and which He governs and defends from His throne at God’s right hand—the same kingdom more fully revealed in the pages of the New Testament. The context of Psalm 145, as well as the Hebrew parallelism in verses 9-10, ought to have kept some from reading “common grace” into Psalm 145:9.

This is also the exegesis of Psalm 145 of John Owen, who writes,

David, indeed, tells us that “the LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy;” that “the Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works,” Ps. cxlv. 8, 9: but he tells us withal whom he intends by the “all” in this place, even the “generations which praise his works and declare his mighty acts,” verse 4; those who “abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness, and sing of his righteousness,” verse 7; or his “saints,” as he expressly calls them, verse 10. The work he there mentions is the work of the kingdom of Christ over all, wherein the tender mercies of God are spread abroad in reference to them that do enjoy them.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, these are the comments on Psalm 145:9 of Presbyterian pastor and theologian, C. Matthew McMahon:

God is good to all men everywhere in His *indiscriminate providence*. The Psalmist says God is good to *all* in Psalm 145. God’s good gifts are indiscriminately given to all men all over the world, but it is *not* a kind of “grace.” The verse that is often emphasized is verse 9, “The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.” God certainly is good to “all.” The Hebrew literally reads, “Good is Yahweh towards all.” But who is the “all”? The only way we can understand the “all” of the verse is to keep it in context. The word “all” is linked synonymously to the latter part of the verse “all His works.” The word “good” is linked synonymously to “tender mercies.” Verse 9 is

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<sup>3</sup> John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 12 (Great Britain: Banner, 1966), pp. 559-560.

linked to verse 10 which explains who the “all” are and repeats the words “all your works” again. The “all,” “all His works,” “all Your works,” and “saints” refer to the *same thing*: those who in verse 8 know the graciousness of God and the fullness of His mercy. Only those of verse 11, those saints, are able to speak of the power of God and His glory, and in verse 12 they are the ones who make known His “mighty acts.”<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, if we would follow the eisegesis of those who believe that “all [God’s] works” in Psalm 145:9 include every human being bar none, we would also be forced to conclude that the same would apply to “every living thing” in verse 16. But if we grant this, this would necessarily require us to believe that God “satisfies the desire” for food (vv. 15-16) of every human being in the history of the world—yet we know that many thousands have died, and still die, by hunger. Also “every living thing” is said to “wait upon” God for food (v. 15). This may well include animals, birds and fish (cf. Ps. 104:21, 25-28), as well as God’s children who seek from Him alone their daily bread. But the reprobate are unbelievers; they do not truly wait upon or pray to God for food in faith!

The exegetical method of those who hold to “common grace” leads to absurdities in Psalm 145, both as regards verses 9-10 and verses 15-16, as well as missing the meaning of the psalm as whole. Let us not isolate parts of verses to make them say what we think they say, but let us interpret Scripture with Scripture. If we do that with this psalm, we cannot but conclude that the theory of a “common grace” for elect and reprobate is not in view here at all. Instead, Psalm 145 praises God for revealing His might (vv. 4-6, 11-13) and goodness (vv. 7-9) and nearness (vv. 14, 18-19) in His glorious kingdom. Verse 20 summarizes for us God’s attitude and will towards the two antithetical, spiritual peoples: “The Lord preserveth all them that love him: *but all the wicked will he destroy.*” Why? The holy and unchangeable God of the kingdom “is righteous in all his ways” (v. 17).

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<sup>4</sup> C. Matthew McMahon, *The Two Wills of God Made Easy: Does God Really Have Two Wills?* (USA: Puritan Publications, 2016), p. 69; italics McMahon’s.

## XVII.



## CONCLUSION

**T**HE ONLY way to know God's love and blessing is through faith in Jesus Christ. Because of the fall, the human race is under the curse of God. By His effectual, saving death on the cross, the Lord Jesus bore God's curse for His people so that God's blessing comes to those who are in Christ. Any doctrine of a love of God or a blessing of God for the reprobate, not only denies God's perfect justice—for how can God love and speak good about totally depraved, reprobate sinners?—but also slights the glory of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Christ alone mediates God's love and blessing to believers! Thus, the philosophy that God loves and blesses people outside of Jesus Christ attacks the gospel. If God really loves them—and His love is divine: eternal, unchangeable and powerful—surely He will not allow them to perish in hell. Thus the advocates of common grace, especially as they go further down this line, are increasingly teaching that there is a sense in which Jesus died for everybody or even that Christ actually died for all men head for head. Believing in a love of God for all and a cross for all, it is more and more being suggested, and even affirmed, that those who remain in other religions or none may ultimately be saved.

The canonical significance of the book of Psalms is that it is the church's song book, a book of worship, devotion, praise and prayer, as we lift up our hearts and voices in melody to God. Psalms 5 and 11 teach a hatred of God for some and oppose a love of God for everybody. Who would sing this? Psalm 73 and 92 are against the notion that the good things that God gives to the reprobate come out of a divine love for them. Many would not want to worship the Almighty using these inspired words. Psalm 69 contains the prayers of Christ on the cross against common grace and the free offer. Sadly, this Word of God in the church's inspired song book offends many professing Christians.

Do you worship God singing these Psalms? David did. Asaph did. The church in the Old Testament and New Testament did. Many faithful churches do today. However, many slight the Psalms and especially those Psalms that we have been considering. Such Psalms would kill the supposed worship of many professing Christian churches. The number one heresy in modern, evangelical, uninspired hymnody is a universal love of God. Most hymnbooks are filled with it. John and Charles Wesley wrote their hymns to promote Arminianism's universal love of God and to attack predestination. The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster's hymnal is riddled with Arminian ideas<sup>5</sup> and most hymnals are worse. As a church departs, the Psalms are first slighted and then largely ignored; in come the Arminian hymns, designed to present a nicer, cosier god and to make people feel good. Let us return to the Psalms and their humbling presentation of the glory of God and His sovereign, particular grace in Jesus Christ, over against common grace and the free offer.

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<sup>5</sup> For a critique of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster hymnal (*Our Own Hymn Book*) see the following article: [www.cprf.co.uk/articles/freepresbyterianhymnal.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/freepresbyterianhymnal.htm).

## **Useful Websites:**

[www.cprf.co.uk](http://www.cprf.co.uk)

[www.limerickreformed.com](http://www.limerickreformed.com)

[www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)

[standardbearer.rfpa.org/](http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/)

[www.prca.org/prtj/](http://www.prca.org/prtj/)

[www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)

<http://cerc.org.sg/>

<http://www.britishreformed.org/>





