

**5. Explain the doctrine of common grace relating the doctrine to the limitations of secular psychologists to understand true information about the human condition.**

**I. Breakdown of the Question**

- A. *What is the Doctrine of Common Grace?*
- B. *What is the true information about the Human Condition?*
- C. *How does the Doctrine of Common Grace limit secular counselors to understand the true information about the human condition?*

**II. What is the Doctrine of Common Grace?**

- A. The doctrine of common grace is essentially when all people experience, enjoy, and receive blessings from God regardless of whether they have received salvific grace.
  - 1. “Common grace is the good kindness of God that he shows to all people regardless of whether they have experienced the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ alone. It is called common because it comes to all people-believers and unbelievers alike. It is referred to as grace because this kindness of God is undeserved.”<sup>1</sup>
  - 2. “The doctrine of common grace pertains to the sovereign grace of God bestowed upon all of mankind regardless of their election.”<sup>2</sup>
  - 3. “The grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation. The word *common* here means something that is common to all people and is not restricted to believers or the elect only.”<sup>3</sup>
  - 4. “Nonsaving grace, which leads to many good things even in fallen culture.”<sup>4</sup>
  - 5. “John Murray defines *common grace* as “*every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God.*”<sup>5</sup>
  - 6. “The common grace of God in the intellectual realm also results in an ability to grasp truth and distinguish it from error, and to experience growth in knowledge that can be used in the investigation of the universe and in the task of subduing the earth. This means that *all science and technology carried out by non-Christians is a result of common grace*, allowing them to make incredible discoveries and inventions, to develop the earth’s resources into many material goods, to

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<sup>1</sup> Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry*, 67.

<sup>2</sup> What is Common Grace?, gotquestions.org.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 657.

<sup>4</sup> John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 1148.

<sup>5</sup> John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 247.

## ACBC Theology – Question 5

produce and distribute resources, and to have skill in their productive work.”<sup>6</sup>

### B. Verses

1. Matt 5:43-45
2. Psalm 145:9
3. Luke 6:35-36
4. Acts 14:16-17
5. John 1:9
6. Rom. 13:1-5; Prov. 11:27, 29
  - a. “God also demonstrates his common grace by giving *warnings of final judgment in the operation of the natural world*. God has so ordered the world that living according to the moral standards very often brings rewards in the natural realm, and violating God’s standards often brings destruction to people, in both cases indicating the eventual direction of the final judgment: Honesty, hard work, showing love and kindness to others, and faithfulness in marriage and family will (except in the most corrupt societies) bring much more material and emotional reward in this life than dishonesty, laziness, cruelty, marital infidelity, and other wrongs such as drunkenness, drug abuse, theft, and so forth. These normal consequences of sin or righteousness should serve as a warning of judgment to come, and, in this way, they are also examples of God’s common grace.”<sup>7</sup>

### III. What is the true information about the Human Condition?

A. The human condition is one that is totally depraved.

1. We are spiritually dead (Gen 2:16-17; Rom 5:12; Eph 2:1-3; Col 2:13; Psalm 51:5, 58:3).
2. Darkened in our understanding with a corrupt heart (Gen 6:5; Gen 8:21; Eccl 9:3; Jer 17:9; Mark 7:21-23; John 3:19; Rom 8:7-8; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 4:17-19, 5:8; Titus 1:15).
3. Enslaved to our sin nature (John 8:44; Eph 2:1-2; 2 Tim 2:25-26; 1 John 3:10, 5:19; John 8:34; Rom 6:20; Titus 3:3).
4. Unable to change from our corrupt nature apart from a working of the Holy Spirit (Job 14:4; Jer 13:23; Matt 7:16-18, 12:33; John 6:44; John 6:65, Rom 11:35-36, 1 Cor 2:14, 4:7; 2 Cor 3:5).

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<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 659.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 661.

## ACBC Theology – Question 5

- B. “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”<sup>8</sup>
- C. “The biblical doctrine of total depravity defines the true human condition. Due to Adam’s fall into sin, mankind is corrupt by sin in every area of his life; mind, emotions, and will have all been tainted. We think sinfully, we feel sinfully, and we choose sinfully. We naturally love darkness (John 3:19), and we do not understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14).”<sup>9</sup>

### IV. **How does the Doctrine of Common Grace limit secular counselors to understand the true information about the human condition?**

- A. The doctrine of common grace grants all mankind intellectual provisions, regardless of their status in God’s election. God’s common grace does allow secular counselors to make observations, but when it comes to interpretations and interventions based on those observations, they are basing those interpretations on a secular worldview, one that is hostile to God (Rom 8:7; 1 Cor 1:18, 1:25, 2:14).
  - 1. “It is most helpful to understand the information available in psychology as existing on three levels: observations, interpretations, and interventions.”<sup>10</sup>
    - a. “*Observations* are the information all people come to know through God’s common grace.”<sup>11</sup>
    - b. “When unbelievers come to know facts, they interpret those facts as someone who does not love and trust the God of the Bible. When believers come to know facts, they will eventually interpret those facts as worshipers of the living God.”<sup>12</sup>
    - c. “The *interpretations* of psychologists are when they seek to understand the information produced by their observations . . . No mechanism exists to separate our observations from our interpretations. We seek to make sense out of the information we come to grasp on the commitments we cherish.”<sup>13</sup>
    - d. “The *interventions* of secular psychology are efforts to employ interpreted observations in helping people in counseling. It is at this point that the discipline of secular psychology produces the secular therapies.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter IX, Sect. 3.

<sup>9</sup> What is the human condition according to the Bible?, gotquestions.org.

<sup>10</sup> Heath Lambert, A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry, 76.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>12</sup> Heath Lambert, A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry, 77.

<sup>13</sup> Heath Lambert, A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry, 77.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 78.

## ACBC Theology – Question 5

2. “A Christian must start with a Christian foundation and build upon it a Christian methodology that rests upon and is consistent with that foundation. In the common grace of God, unbelievers stumble over aspects of truth in God’s creation. They always distort these by their sin and from their non-Christians stance toward life. But *from the vantage point of his biblical foundation* the Christian counselor may take note of, evaluate, and reclaim the truth dimly reflected by the unbeliever so long as he does so in a manner consistent with biblical principles and methodology. He may not become eclectic, however. That means that he may not start the other way around. He may not begin pragmatically by gathering together every method that looks like it might work, whether it involves a couch or a mirror or a room large enough for a group.”<sup>15</sup>
3. “By common grace, unbelievers do *some* good, and we should see God’s hand in it and be thankful for common grace as it operates in every friendship, every act of kindness, every way in which it brings blessing to others. All of this—though the unbeliever does not know it—is ultimately from God and he deserves the glory for it.”<sup>16</sup>
4. “Saved and unsaved people are able to know correct information . . . However, Paul mentions that there are blessings from this worldly wisdom. Although worldly wisdom does not lead to salvation, good things come from it, like the production of useful information and wealth (1 Cor. 1:26). These are blessings we receive even when trusting in them leads to our destruction.”<sup>17</sup>
5. “It is important to note that neither Genesis 3 nor Psalm 1 leaves any room for a third, neutral counsel. One of Satan’s ruses (as an angel of light) is to convince those who claim theological sophistication to accept error under the slogan, ‘All truth is God’s truth.’ Under that banner nearly every error in the book has been blamed on God!”<sup>18</sup>
6. “Indeed, it is entirely false to speak of what science discovers as divine *revelation*. It is human *discovery* made possible by common grace—and that is all. Revelation comes from God; discovery from man. And the discoveries that are unearthed may or may not be correctly interpreted. Most of the supposed ‘discoveries’ turn out to be nothing more than the views of humans trying to understand nature. Surely this cannot be rightly termed ‘revelation.’”<sup>19</sup>

B.

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<sup>15</sup> Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselors Manual*, 92.

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 665.

<sup>17</sup> Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry*, 69.

<sup>18</sup> Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Is All Truth God’s Truth?*, 27.

## ACBC Theology – Question 5

- C. Secular psychologies approach to counseling is based, not on the Word of God, but on the wisdom of men. The general consensus, from both secular and biblical counselors, is that our counselees are hurting, suffering, etc., and that they need change. However, this is where the consensus ends. The ultimate goal of biblical counseling is to minister the Word of God to them, bringing them into a saving relationship with God. Conversely, the goal of secular counseling is to simply provide relief from their temporary suffering.

### V. Resources

#### ACBC Approved Reading List

**Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 65-101.**

**Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption, The Jay Adams Library* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 8-9.**

**John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2013), 246-248; 712.**

Jay E. Adams, Is All Truth God's Truth?

John MacArthur, ed., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 487-489.

Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 332-335.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Complete ed (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2018), 432-446.

#### Other Resources

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 657-665