

# EDITORIAL: HYPER-CALVINIST! (5)

*Rev. Martyn McGeown*

## Bringing Out the Big Guns

In our last editorial, we defined God's grace and demonstrated its particularity. In this issue, we intend to address the main texts to which Phillip R. Johnson appeals in defence of "common grace," the denial of which, alleges Johnson, places one in the dreaded camp of the hyper-Calvinists.<sup>1</sup>

Before we address those texts, let us deal with a point of confusion. Many who believe in "common grace" do so because God in His providence gives good gifts to the reprobate wicked, *which they do not deserve*. "Every day that a wicked person lives in this world is grace to him, for everything apart from hell is grace," is the argument of many. We agree wholeheartedly that the reprobate wicked deserve nothing—they do not even deserve to live. However, that is not the same thing as grace. It is important in order to avoid confusion to use words as Scripture uses them. In this case, it is important not to confuse grace with providence. Sometimes, those who believe in "common grace" and those who do not are talking past one another because they do not properly define their terms.

Grace in Scripture is God's favour. The issue is not whether God gives good things to the wicked, which they do not deserve to have, but what is God's purpose in so doing and, especially, what is God's attitude to the wicked to whom He gives such good gifts? If God's purpose in prolonging the life of the reprobate wicked is to enable them to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath (Rom. 2:5) or to place them on slippery places so that they are cast down into destruction (Ps. 73:18) or that they might be destroyed forever (Ps. 92:7), we cannot call that grace.

## Psalm 145:9

First, Johnson urges that common grace is "God's goodness to humanity in general" and quotes Psalm 145:9: "The LORD is good to all: and his tender

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<sup>1</sup> Phil Johnson, "A Primer on Hyper-Calvinism" ([www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/hypercal.htm](http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/hypercal.htm)).

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mercies are over all his works.” Here, although the Psalmist does not write “grace,” he praises God’s “tender mercies,” and in the previous verse he writes, “The LORD is gracious (Hebrew root: *hen*), and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy” (v. 8). The question is, who are the “all” of verse 9?

A Calvinist such as Johnson must not demur at such a question, because he faces it elsewhere, such as in II Corinthians 5:14-15 (“one died for all ... he died for all”). If Johnson does not want to deny the particularity of the atonement, he must interpret the word “all” in a certain way in II Corinthians 5:14-15. The exegesis of that text is, however, not at issue here.

Suffice to say that context determines the meaning of the word “all” in any particular text. Psalm 145 is Hebrew poetry. Therefore, we would expect the phenomenon called “Hebrew parallelism,” in which the second phrase of a verse is a further explanation of the first phrase. “The Lord is good to all” is clarified by “and his tender mercies are over all his works.” Therefore, “all” refers to “all his works.” But what do “all his works” mean? Do “all his works” include the reprobate wicked? Certainly, God *did* create the reprobate wicked but are they included or excluded *here*? We are not left to speculate, for verse 10 further elucidates verse 9: “All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.” Therefore, the “all” of verse 9 equals the “all thy works” of verse 10, which equals the “all thy saints” of verse 10. Do the reprobate wicked (who, Johnson claims, are included in the “all” of verse 9) *praise* God? Do they *bless* Him (v. 10)? Do they *speak* of the glory of His kingdom (v. 11)? Do the eyes of the reprobate wicked (“the eyes of all”) *wait upon* God (v. 15)?

The reprobate wicked do appear in Psalm 145, but here is what the Psalmist says about them: “but all the wicked will he destroy” (v. 20). Is God *good* to them as He destroys them and *are God’s tender mercies over them* as He destroys them? To ask such questions is to answer them. Therefore, “common grace” is neither implicitly nor explicitly taught in Psalm 145. In fact, we see from Psalm 145 that God’s attitude toward the reprobate wicked is hatred, not love (v. 20).

### **Deuteronomy 10:15**

Johnson’s next proof text for common grace is from Deuteronomy 10. In that chapter, God assures Israel of His love: “only the LORD had a delight in

thy fathers to love them ..." (v. 15). This love is a particular love, for God did not love, delight in or choose others (cf. 7:6-10). In response to His love, God demands love from Israel, for "He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (10:18-19).

From these verses, Johnson aims to prove two assertions. First, God loves all men, at least in some sense. Notice, however, that the word "grace" is absent from the text, and that Johnson is trying to prove "common grace," not common love. He blurs somewhat the distinction between "type #4" and "type #5" hyper-Calvinism here.<sup>2</sup> Second, God's love to all men is demonstrated in "common" things, "in giving [them] food and raiment."

However, what Johnson must demonstrate exegetically is that the "stranger" of verse 18 includes *all* strangers. Does God love, show mercy to, and provide food and raiment for absolutely *all* strangers? Do not some strangers starve to death and do not some strangers remain unclothed? God fed and clothed the widow of Zarephath but there were many other widows with sons in Sidon, whom God did not feed and clothe; and there were many widows in Israel, whom God did not feed and clothe (Luke 4:25-26). Do not even some of God's people starve to death (cf. Luke 16:22)? Did God not love *them*?

When Paul says in Romans 5:6 that "Christ died for the ungodly," he does not mean *all* the ungodly. He simply means that those for whom Christ died are ungodly. Similarly, those whom God loves are the believing strangers who joined God's people Israel and He commands Israel to provide for strangers. This does not mean that God loves absolutely *all* strangers or that He has mercy, grace or favour for *all* strangers. And it certainly does not mean that God loves *reprobate* strangers or that He is gracious to them. Moreover, that God loves some by giving them food and raiment does not mean that, whenever God gives food and raiment, He *always* gives these things in love (or in "common grace"), and, whenever God withholds food and raiment, He *always* withholds them in wrath as a sign of His displeasure.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Johnson, a "type #4" hyper-Calvinist "denies that there is such a thing as common grace" and a "type #5" hyper-Calvinist "denies that God has any sort of love for the non-elect."

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An ungodly rich man, upon whom the curse of God rests in Proverbs 3:33, has a house stuffed full of food and raiment, and the poor man, in whose house the blessing of God resides, is deprived of much food and raiment, for “Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith” (Prov. 15:16).

In Numbers 11, God supplied quails for Israel, but we read, “And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, *the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people*, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague” (v. 33). Psalm 106:15 is a commentary on that history: “And he gave them their request; but *he sent leanness into their soul.*”

Many Calvinists, such as Johnson, are short sighted in their view of providence: food and clothing are never in themselves indications of God’s favour. The *Heidelberg Catechism* makes a wise distinction here, for we learn to acknowledge in our prayers, that “neither our care nor industry, nor even [God’s] gifts [of daily bread] can profit us without [His] blessing” (A. 125). God can and does give daily bread to the wicked without His blessing or so-called “common grace.”

Similarly, when God “did good” in Acts 14:17 (another text to which Johnson refers), it was as a “witness,” but the ungodly heathen must never imagine, when God “gave [them] rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling [their] hearts with food and gladness,” that this was a demonstration that the Creator loved them, favoured them or sought to bless them. Indeed, Paul writes elsewhere that the *wrath* of God—and not His love or favour—is revealed from heaven through the creation that God has made (Rom. 1:18-20).

God reveals His love, grace, mercy and favour in Jesus Christ! *Only* in Jesus Christ!

### **Matthew 5:44-45**

Next, Johnson quotes the favourite text of all those who advocate common grace, Matthew 5:44-45: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good,

and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” For the sake of completion, let us quote the parallel passage in Luke 6:35: “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.” But to quote these texts *without exegesis* proves nothing. Johnson cannot merely quote them and then write, “That is common grace.” He must demonstrate that *exegetically!*

Because these texts in Matthew and Luke are so crucial to the “common grace” cause, we offer a thorough exegesis.

Matthew 5 is part of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus Christ teaches principles that govern our lives as the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The question in verses 44-45 is how we treat our enemies, who are those who “curse” us (which means to speak evil of and upon us), who “hate” us (which means to wish evil upon us, and to be motivated by malice and spite against us), and who “despitefully use” and “persecute” us (which means to insult, revile and vilify us; and to chase after us with a view to destroying us). The Pharisees responded, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy” (v. 43). In fact, many Pharisees defined “neighbour” so narrowly and “enemy” so broadly that they restricted their love to fellow Jews or even to fellow Pharisees, while they justified hating everyone else.

Jesus taught us to “love” our enemies. That love must be manifested in “blessing” (which means to speak well of someone and to speak good upon them), “doing good” (which takes good speech one step further, so that we perform deeds of kindness for our enemies) and “praying for” our enemies (which means that we seek for them the blessing of God by beseeching our Father to have mercy on them in turning them from their sins to Jesus Christ). This love for our enemies is not a calling to have fellowship with them, which, as long as they remain unconverted, is impossible. The Christian comes in love, blessing, doing good, praying and calling the enemy to repentance; but the enemy responds with hatred, cursing, spiteful use and persecution. Whatever the response of the enemy, the Christian is called to love him still. William Tyndale, who was martyred in 1536, exemplified this Christian virtue of love, when, in a letter to his persecutors, he wrote, “Take away my goods, take away my good name, yet as long as Christ remaineth in me, so long I love thee not a whit the less.”

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In verse 45, Jesus draws a parallel between our calling and the activity of our God and Father, and it is in this parallel especially that some find proof of “common grace.” The activity of God in sending rain and sunshine on both the evil and the good is proof, say many, that God favours, loves, has mercy upon and blesses the evil and the good alike. In Luke 6:35, Jesus draws a similar parallel: “He [i.e., God] is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.”

To understand the parallel, we need to ask a few questions.

First, who are God’s enemies? In Scripture, God has two kinds of enemies: His reprobate enemies, whom He destroys; and His elect enemies, whom He reconciles to Himself and saves. God’s reprobate enemies are the devil, the reprobate demons and reprobate human beings. These are preordained to damnation (Rom. 9:22; I Pet. 2:8; Rev. 17:8). God has decreed *not* to save them. God’s attitude toward these enemies is one of hatred (Rom. 9:13). He curses them and sends them to hell (Luke 19:27). This hatred, this curse and this eternal punishment do not mean that God is evil, spiteful, malicious or cruel, for God’s hatred of the wicked is a righteous, holy hatred of their persons and their sins (Ps. 5:5; 11:5). The *Canons of Dordt* explain the decree of reprobation in these sobering words:

What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture that not all, but only some, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal election of God; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but leaving them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation, which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares Him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger thereof (*Canons I:15*).

But God also has elect enemies. They are “the unthankful” and “the evil” of Luke 6:35. God’s elect enemies are sinners chosen in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world to be saved through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. God’s attitude toward *these* enemies is love: God blesses them, God has mercy on them, God is kind to them, God delivers them from sin and death, and God brings them to everlasting life. God changes these enemies into friends. Believers were these enemies: by nature we were the enemies of God for we once lived as the enemies of God (Eph. 2:3) as those who once hated Him, cursed Him, despitefully used Him and persecuted Christ in His saints (Acts 9:4-5). Paul writes, “For if, *when we were enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10). “And you, *that were sometime alienated and enemies* in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight” (Col. 1:21-22).

Second, what does God do to His enemies according to Matthew 5 and Luke 6, and does He do these things to His elect enemies, His reprobate enemies or both? Matthew 5:45 teaches that God sends sunshine and rain upon all men indiscriminately: “He maketh his sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” The evil and the good or the just and the unjust include all kinds of men: the converted and unconverted, the believer and the unbeliever, and the elect and the reprobate. We see that all around us: God causes the sun to shine and rain to fall upon the field of both godly and ungodly farmers. Often He sends so much rain and sunshine on the ungodly that their fields produce a bumper harvest, they have tables laden with good food, bank accounts stuffed with money and good health to enjoy these things that come from God’s hand.

But does an abundance of good things (“rain and sunshine”) mean that God is *blessing* the ungodly in those things or that those things are evidence of God’s *favour*? That is the issue with “common grace.” Remember that, according to Johnson and his allies, common grace is supposed to be a favourable attitude of God toward the reprobate wicked seen in the good things that God gives to them. That would mean that God, when He gives rain and sunshine and lots of other good things to the wicked, is saying to them, “In these things, I love you; I have favour upon you; I show mercy to you; and I am gracious to you.

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(But, at the same time, I have eternally determined not to save you; Christ did not die for you; and I will cast you into hell).”

What, then, is God saying to His own people when He sends them so much sunshine that their crops wither and die so that they starve, or when He sends them so much rain that He washes away their houses in a flood? “In these things, I hate you; in these things, I do not have favour on you; in these things, I seek your destruction; in these things, I express my displeasure against you.” God forbid!

That would mean that God, in giving good things to the wicked, is blessing them, speaking His favour upon them and seeking to do them good. But that would be a blessing of God, which does not accomplish their good, but increases their guilt; a blessing of God, which comes to an end when they die and go to hell; and a blessing of God, which changes into a curse.

But God’s mercy, grace, love and blessing are *one*. (There are not two kinds of graces, mercies or loves of God; one for the elect, and the other for the reprobate.)<sup>3</sup> All mercy, grace and love of God are everlasting. They are unchangeable. They are attributes of God, they belong to His very Being, they are rooted in God’s decree of election and they are displayed at the cross. Rain and sunshine, *in and of themselves*, are not grace, mercy or blessing. God is always gracious to and blesses His people in giving to, or withholding from, them, rain and sunshine. God is never gracious, but always curses, the reprobate in giving to, or withholding from, them, rain and sunshine. Let it be clearly understood: God gives good things to elect and reprobate alike, *but good things are not blessings for the reprobate*.

Third, which pattern are we called to follow? Do we treat our enemies the way God deals with His elect or His reprobate enemies? If we want a pattern on how to treat our enemies, we only need to consider how He treated us, who were His enemies, and who are still sinful, even after He has reconciled us to Himself. This is especially clear in Luke 6:35, in which Jesus says that God is kind to “the unthankful” and “the evil.” In Luke 6, Jesus does not speak merely of sunshine and rain, which of themselves are neither God’s blessing

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed explanation of God’s simplicity, see my editorials, “A Double-Minded God Unstable in All His Ways” in the *British Reformed Journal*, issues 57 and 58.



nor curse, but He speaks of God's kindness and mercy. The kindness in Luke 6:35 is, and can only be, a saving kindness. There is no other kindness in God. God's kindness is infinitely more than God being "nice" to people. Kindness is God's gentleness, His careful handling of His delicate precious people. God is not kind to the reprobate. He breaks them with a rod of iron and He dashes them in pieces as a potter's vessel (Ps. 2:9). God's kindness is called goodness or graciousness in other passages and is only ever directed toward the elect (Rom. 11:22; I Pet. 2:3). This kindness is shown to the unthankful and to the evil, to us; *we* who believe in Jesus Christ are the unthankful and the evil.

We are to be merciful because God has been merciful *to us*. This saving kindness and mercy shown to us who were, and in many ways still are, unthankful and evil, comes to us from the cross of Christ, a cross that is for the elect alone and not for the reprobate. We see kindness and mercy at the cross where God poured out His wrath upon Jesus Christ, crushing Him under His curse, so that He could be gentle and compassionate to His elect children.

If God was so good to you in sending Christ to die for your sins, not when you were good and thankful, but when you were unthankful and evil, how much more ought you not love those who are evil and unthankful to you? And if God can still bless you, who are still unthankful and evil, how much more ought you not continue to love, bless, do good to and pray for those who are still unthankful and evil to you? And when we love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us *we are reflecting in a very small way* the great love, mercy, grace, kindness and blessing that God has for us.

But that has nothing, I repeat, nothing, to do with "common grace"!

*to be continued (DV) ...*