Common Grace and the Noetic Effect of Sin

The Biblical Counseling and Discipleship Conference, 2016

Exam Track — Theology 5 & 6

Question 5

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

Define Terms

- **Common grace** — "Common grace is the kindness of God that he shows to all people regardless of whether they have experienced the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ alone." [Lambert, 67.]
- Common grace is distinct from general revelation (Rom. 1:20). Common grace is influenced by the noetic effect of sin while general revelation is authoritative.

Define Terms

- **The human condition** (anthropology) — Man is created in the image of God — to represent him in the world through our reasoning, morality, relationships with Him and one another, and in our dominion over creation. But sin and the resulting depravity of man destroy that image. [Lambert, 184-91.]

Define Terms

"[Total depravity] signifies a corruption of our moral and spiritual nature that is total not in degree (for no one is as bad as he or she might be) but in extent. It declares that no part of us is untouched by sin, and therefore no action of ours is as good as it should be, and consequently nothing in us or about us ever appears meritorious in God's eyes. We cannot earn God's favor, no matter what we do; unless grace saves us, we are lost....

Define Terms

"Total depravity entails total inability, that is, the state of not having it in oneself to respond to God and his Word in a sincere and wholehearted way (John 6:44; Rom. 8:7-8)." [Packer, *Concise Theology*, 83-4.]

Key Passages

- John 1:14-15 — God has revealed His grace to all men in Christ
- Matthew 5:45 — God upholds the laws and processes of nature
- Psalm 104:14; Acts 14:17 — God supplies the temporal needs of food, water, and shelter worldwide
- Acts 17:28 — God sustains all life forms, including humanity

Key Passages

- Exodus 31:2-11; 35:30-35 — God facilitates and allows the development of all creative works of man — in philosophy, the arts, sciences, and technology
- Romans 13:3-4 — God maintains social and political order
- 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 — The Spirit of God restrains sin
- Romans 2:14-15 — God provides all men with a conscience so they know what is moral and immoral

Key Passages

- Genesis 8:21-22 — God withholds judgment that is earned and merited
- Romans 2:4 — God gives sinners time to repent

Common Grace and Psychology

- Because of common grace, unbelieving psychologists can contribute *information and observation* about the human condition. [Lambert, 79]
- Through common grace, unbelieving psychologists can encourage and "provoke biblical counselors to greater faithfulness in ministering the Scriptures." [Lambert, 79]

Common Grace and Psychology

- Without particular (saving) grace, unbelieving psychologists cannot offer eternal hope and lasting change for their observations on the nature of humankind.

Question 6

Explain the doctrine of ***the noetic effects of sin*** relating the doctrine to the ability of secular psychologists to understand true information about the human condition.

Define Terms

- ***The noetic effect of sin*** — because of the sin nature, man's mind is incapable of seeing "the facts of reality rightly in relation to God." [Lyndon Unger]
- Abraham Kuyper notes 12 effects of sin on the mind:
  - falsehood
  - unintentional mistakes
  - self–delusion and self–deception
  - the intrusion of fantasy into the imagination

Define Terms

- intentional negative influences of other minds (e.g., in education) upon the mind
- physical weaknesses influencing the total human psychology
- the disorganized relationships of life
- the effect of misinformation and inaccuracies learned from one realm of life upon ideas from another domain
- self–interest

Define Terms

- the weakening of mental energies and the darkening of consciousness
- internal disorganization of life–harmonies
- the loss of the [understanding of one's place in the world] found only in the revealed knowledge of God, by which one may see the whole

Key Passages

- Romans 1:18-23
- Romans 3:9-20
- Romans 8:6 — their minds are set on the flesh (sin)
- Ephesians 4:17-19
  - His mind is IDOLATROUS (v. 17)
  - His thoughts are DARK (v. 18)

Key Passages

  - His ignorance is WILLFUL (v. 18)
  - His heart is HARD (v. 18)
- Colossians 2:8
- 1 Corinthians 2:11-15 — without the Spirit of God:
  - the unbeliever cannot know the thoughts of God (v. 11)
  - the unbeliever is bound by the spirit of the world (v. 12)
  - the unbeliever does not accept the things of the Spirit (v. 14a)
  - the unbeliever cannot understand the things of the Spirit (v. 14b)

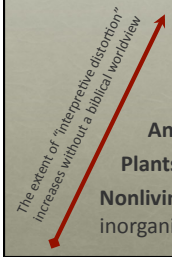
Key Passages

- Jeremiah 17:9 — the heart (the emotional and desire center of the mind) is deceitful, sick, and incomprehensible. This is what leads us to ask about the world, "*why* do they do that…?"

Relationship of the Noetic Effect of Sin to Psychology

- "Common grace makes it possible for unbelievers to know facts, but the noetic effects of sin make it impossible for them to embrace the most important facts. The closer unbelievers get in counseling to issues having to do with God, the ultimate meaning of life, and the problems that plague humanity, the greater will be the impact of the noetic effects of sin on their thinking and the more cautious Christians must be in accepting the information they produce." [Lambert, 71]

Relationship of the Noetic Effect of Sin to Psychology



God (biblical and theological studies)
Humanity (anthropology, sociology, psychology)
Animals (zoology)
Plants (botany)
Nonliving, physical creation (physics, astronomy, inorganic chemistry, geology)

From *Scripture and Counseling*

Relationship of the Noetic Effect of Sin to Psychology

- A key component of salvation is the redemption of the mind (1 Cor. 2:15; Rom. 12:1-2); the believer *has* been made a new creature with a new mind (2 Cor. 5:16-17) and because of remaining flesh, he is to constantly renew his mind (Eph. 4:23) in his battle against sin.
- The renewed mind of a mature and growing believer is capable to help people in their battle with sin in ways that a secular psychologist never can.