

JOIN US FOR AN 8-WEEK STUDY OF HTPC'S

# *First Principles*

A decorative flourish consisting of a horizontal line with a central dot and two pointed ends extending outwards.

**SUNDAYS**

**5:45 - 7:00 PM**

**SEPTEMBER 13 - NOVEMBER 15**

in the fellowship hall

# How Sweet and Awesome Is The place

1. How sweet and awesome is the place  
with Christ within the doors,  
while everlasting love displays  
the choicest of her stores.
2. While all our hearts and all our songs  
join to admire the feast,  
each of us cries, with thankful tongue,  
"Lord, why was I a guest?"

# How Sweet and Awesome Is The place

3. "Why was I made to hear your voice,  
and enter while there's room,  
when thousands make a wretched choice,  
and rather starve than come?"
4. 'Twas the same love that spread the feast  
that sweetly drew us in;  
else we had still refused to taste,  
and perished in our sin.

# How Sweet and Awesome Is The place

5. Pity the nations, O our God,  
constrain the earth to come;  
send your victorious Word abroad,  
and bring the strangers home.
  
6. We long to see your churches full,  
that all the chosen race  
may, with one voice and heart and soul,  
sing your redeeming grace.

# Total Depravity and Business Ethics

By Richard Gaffin

# Richard Gaffin

- Born into godly home; father was Presbyterian minister. Dr. Gaffin studied Scriptures and Catechism as child.
- Father studied under J. Gresham Machen; part of first graduating class at Westminster Seminary.
- Parents were among first OPC missionaries (to China and Taiwan). Dr. Gaffin born in Taiwan.
- His father-in-law, E.J. Young, was one of first Old Testament professors at Westminster.

# Biography Continued

- Attended Calvin College; then studied at Westminster. Studied under Dr. Van Til and Professor Murray.
- Theological contribution: Stewarding legacy of Dr. Van Til and Dr. Vos.
- By far my most influential seminary professor and subsequent mentor. BIBLE. PERIOD. ALWAYS. ONLY. AMEN.

# Basic Orienting Points

We know God, ourselves and the world around us because GOD HAS CHOSEN TO MAKE THESE THINGS KNOWN. *Revelational epistemology*. God reveals; we receive.

Not a problem in pre-fall world. What happens after sin? What effects did sin have on our minds? (Noetic— from Greek *nous*— effects of sin.)

“All the historic Christian traditions agree, more or less as stated...to deny the reality of sin is to deprive Christianity of any real meaning....however...perennial dispute about... the depravity or corruption of sin. Briefly stated the issue is this: Is human depravity total or partial? Is there...a *remnant* in human nature that is left *unpolluted* by sin?”

**Specifically, is there any capacity that sin doesn't govern? E.g., human reason?**

# An overview:

## ❖ Doctrine of Total Depravity

- The antithesis
- The unbeliever's capacities
- Conclusions

## ❖ Doctrine of Common Grace

- God's restraint of sin and its consequence
- God's general benevolence

## ❖ Implications for Business Ethics

- The use of general vs. special revelation in business ethics
- What about capitalism?

# **Doctrine of Total Depravity**

# Total Depravity: The Antithesis

- 1 Corinthians 1:18-19 [Wisdom of world vs. Wisdom of God]

*“For the word of the cross is **folly** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the **power of God**. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’”*

- The **world in its wisdom** rejects **Christ** the power of **God** as foolishness
  - **God** confounds and nullifies **man’s wisdom** and power
- 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 [Natural man vs. Spiritual man]

*“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.”*

- **Total** and **exclusive** conflict between believer and unbeliever
- **Only two** types of people - no third/neutral group

# Total Depravity: The Unbeliever's Capacities

- Unbeliever does not accept the things of God's Spirit because he is **unable**
  - He **cannot** understand them
- The scope of the unbeliever's misunderstanding is **total**, not partial
  - Note: 1 Corinthians 2:15 "The spiritual person judges **all things...**"  
*so therefore...*  
The un-spiritual person discerns/judges **nothing**.
  - Not just in regard to the religious/moral sphere but total

"There is no warrant for restricting the inability...to a religious or moral sphere, in distinction from other areas of human knowledge and endeavor. The inability of the unbelievers to understand, their **epistemological inability**, is comprehensive and total."

DOES EVERYONE UNDERSTAND THIS??? CRUCIAL POINT HERE.

# Total Depravity: The Unbeliever's Capacities (cont.)

- ***Immoral, sinful inability*** rather than innocent inability. Ex: Acts 17 -- The Athenians' ignorance revealed in their altar to an unknown God is not innocent. Their *scientific* sneering at the proclamation of the resurrection of the dead and Final Judgment; their ignorance: **culpable ignorance**.
  - **Ignorance that needs to be repented of.**
  - DOES EVERYONE UNDERSTAND THIS? EVERY REVELATION OF GOD TO UNBELIEVER ENDS WITH SOVEREIGN SUMMONS: *REPENT*. REPENT FOR TRANSGRESSING THE CREATOR-CREATURE RELATIONSHIP.
  - WHOM DOES THAT REMIND YOU OF FROM PAST ARTICLES?

(cont.)

# Total Depravity: The Unbeliever's Capacities (cont.)

- Ephesians 4:17-19

*“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the **futility of their minds**. They are **darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God** because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their **hardness of heart**. They have become **callous** and have given themselves up to **sensuality**, greedy to practice **every kind of impurity**.”*

cf. Romans 1:21: “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile **in their thinking**, and their **foolish hearts** were darkened.”

- Note the relationship between darkened understanding, a hardened heart, and sinful living. “When the heart hardens, the mind darkens.” *Enlightenment* as tragic misnomer.

# Total Depravity: Conclusions & Gospel Implications

- “The Bible **never** relativizes sin. To do so, it should not be forgotten, relativizes the gospel and gives rise to cooperate schemes in which we presumably contribute, no matter how minimally or covertly, to our own salvation.” The Reformers: total depravity and *sola gratia* stand or fall together!!

“The Gospel is God’s call to those who are **dead** in transgressions and sins to hear and live.”

- The sheer graciousness of God in the Gospel when we realize the **depths** of our sin
  - We cannot but sin, because **we are sinners**
  - Nothing about human nature relieves its corruption
  - There is **no** remnant of goodness in us (actual or potential).
- 
- DO YOU BELIEVE THIS ABOUT EVERY PERSON IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD? DO YOU SEE SOME PEOPLE AS “LESS” FALLEN THAN OTHERS? Do you believe this about people whom you evangelize? Why do we shy away from this point? What happens when we shy away here?

# **Doctrine of Common Grace**

# Doctrine of Common Grace: Introduction

- Countless examples of “good” in unbelievers:
  - Examples in our observation:
    - The unbelieving community volunteer who does great philanthropic work
    - The atheist scientist who makes life-saving medical advances
  - Examples recognized by Scripture:
    - Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel and is said by the Lord to have done well
    - The pagan inhabitants of Malta show Paul and those with him “unusual kindness” and generously furnish them with needed supplies
- **With these examples and more, does our doctrine of total depravity, then, exaggerate and distort human sinfulness?**
  - Is there not a remnant of goodness in some / all people?
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# Doctrine of Common Grace: The Big Picture

- The answer to these observed gradations within humanity lies in nothing less than...**GOD** and His kindness and graciousness

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- Genesis 3 begins the Bible's entire message of **postponed judgment**:
  - **Delay** of the eschatological salvation of the church  
AND
  - **Delay** of the deserved eschatological destruction of unbelievers
- What happens in the **time between** the Garden and the final judgment of Christ?
  - **God's favor** displayed to **all**
    - Both his special-electing-saving grace toward **his elect**  
AND
    - His general, non-saving kindness and forbearance toward **every creature**

This common grace of God embraces the entire creation.

# God's Common Grace: His Divine Restraint

- The essence of common grace is one of divine restraint of:
  - His wrath and judgment
  - Sin itself, and its consequences
- How do we know this?
  - Sin is lawlessness, rebellion against God, and therefore inevitably ruinous and chaos-producing -- its inherent tendency, left unchecked/unrestrained, is to destroy everything, including the sinner himself
  - At the time of the Fall, God restrains sin and its hellish consequences
  - Now, God spares *some* the extremes of degrading depravity to which he “gives over” others, extremes to which **ALL** are by nature disposed
  - Within God's curse lies the graciousness of God!!
    - Adam's labor, though now difficult, remains productive
    - Eve, though cursed in childbearing, still brings forth children

“The history of this present world exists within an administration that is one of restraint and forbearance.”

# God's Common Grace: **His General Benevolence**

- The entire creation is the constant recipient of untold blessing:
  - Rain from heaven, crops in their seasons, provision of food -- creature comforts
  - The unbeliever is interested in what is right and good in the world (arts/science)
  - And God bestows and produces good on/through their contributions which benefits the whole of humanity

# Six Considerations

1. The paradox of common grace
2. Common grace is a misnomer -- it is not indiscriminate but it differentiates
3. Common grace also explains the “grayness” -- the disconcerting and sobering ambiguity that frequently results from comparing believers and unbelievers.
4. But these similarities are not based on any limitations on their total depravity; they are not due to uncorrupted remnants in unbelievers.
5. The unbeliever’s capacity to reason, volition, power of discrimination, and our sense of community are all remnants that have been preserved...by God.
6. Unbelievers have knowledge. UNACKNOWLEDGED BORROWED CAPITAL.

# God's Common Grace: Six Considerations

## 1. The paradox of common grace

- a. *Observation*: The unbeliever cannot do good, but he does do good...?
- b. *Unbiblical Distinction*: Differentiate between natural good (unbeliever is capable) and religious good (unbeliever is incapable)
  - a. *Biblical Distinction*: Differentiate between conformity and obedience

- **God does incite conformity** in unbelievers, though **not a genuine obedience** to Himself and to His will
- *Even though it conforms to His law, it is compatible with hostility toward Him (Romans 8:7-8 “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.”)*
  - But to neglect the law would be more sinful and displeasing to God
- More than merely an external conformity, there is also an inward dynamic - emotions, will, desires that drive their conformity (ex: they *desire* to be a blessing to others)
- **But, no matter how positive it is, it is always restraint and not renewal.**
- Their “good works” do not restore them at their core or remove their total depravity

# God's Common Grace: **Six Considerations**

## 2. **Common grace is a misnomer -- it is not indiscriminate but it differentiates**

- a. Yes it does seem to differentiate
- b. But IT, not some self-determining capacity in ourselves, explains the wide, varied spectrum of sinful humanity's behavior
  - i. Ex: one unbeliever is "given over" to their sin and another is prosperous and happy during his life
- c. God's restraining and preserving grace is not predictable

# God's Common Grace: **Six Considerations**

3. **Common grace also explains the “grayness” -- the disconcerting and sobering ambiguity that frequently results from comparing believers and unbelievers.**
  - Too often the world exceeds in many areas that the church fails
  - **“Seldom in life do we encounter an antithesis between full-blown wickedness and undeviating holiness.”**
  - There is a striking likeness between believers and unbelievers at times

*And this is explained by the doctrine of God's common grace.*

# God's Common Grace: **Six Considerations**

4. **But these similarities are not based on any limitations on their total depravity; they are not due to uncorrupted remnants in unbelievers.**
- Where there are functions of the original nature of man present, those are remnants of that **image of God** in fallen nature
  - But the existence of these remnants doesn't alleviate our depravity
  - **Sin hasn't destroyed God's image but has redirected its capacities totally, from the heart, in total hostility toward God**
  - Sin has not annihilated our humanity -- man (male/female) is a sinner...this is the desperate culpability of sin.
  - **METAPHYSICALLY, WE HAVE EVERYTHING IN COMMON WITH UNBELIEVERS. EPISTEMOLOGICALLY, WE HAVE NOTHING IN COMMON WITH THEM.**

# God's Common Grace: **Six Considerations**

5. The unbeliever's capacity to reason, volition, power of discrimination, and our sense of community are all remnants that have been preserved...by God.

- Regarding this sense of community, consider how sin's self-destructive tendency is alienation and eventual isolation from others
- God preserves humanity from destructive and chaotic self-isolation...people like people
- But, this isn't unscathed by total depravity since Romans 1:32 reminds us that unbelievers not only sin, but they also *give approval to others to others who sin*

# God's Common Grace: **Six Considerations**

## 6. Unbelievers have knowledge

- Yes, think about technology for example, which begins (Cain building the first city in Genesis 4) and has certainly continued to develop impressively in the line of unbelief.
- But, Jesus and Paul are emphatic that unbelievers understand **nothing *truly***.
- They suppress the truth by their wickedness; their knowledge is ignorance and futile and darkened, fragmented and ambiguous; “illusory integrity”
- Ex: Calvin's example of travelers at night -- lightning flashes and they can see for a split second; from then on they know, but do not know -- *“For an instant the terrain around them has been illumined far and wide, but before they can take even a step, they are plunged back into darkness and left groping about aimlessly.”*

# **Implications for Business Ethics**

# Implications for Business Ethics

- **Two controlling perspectives on business and economic life:**
  1. **Balance** needs to be maintained between common grace and total depravity as two, correlative, mutually-qualifying poles; to ignore either or emphasize one without the other results in distortions
  1. Until Christ's return for Final judgment, we can count on the maintenance of at least some measure of economic stability, the continuation of available resources and structures for production - despite catastrophes - conditions of economic viability and, on occasion, well-being and even prosperity.

**BUT, we rely on God, not man,** not on presumed remnants of good will or common sense, conscience, but on God's covenanted fidelity to sinful humanity and the creation.

Left to ourselves, we can only reckon chaos and disaster...but God is restraining the effects of sin, and therefore allowing some sort of economic order to be maintained in this world order.

# Some questions to answer:

- 1. What can be derived for business ethics from general/natural revelation?**
- 2. Is business conduct based on special revelation ethically superior to that based on general revelation?**
- 3. Does capitalism cater to human depravity?**

# 1. What can be derived for business ethics from general/natural revelation?

- Strictly speaking, nothing
- The world around us is “plain” but full of unbelieving truth-suppressors that see all things in a futile, darkened way
- **Only the acceptance of God’s special saving revelation in Christ will warrant a *true* understanding of general revelation**
- Business codes based on self-interest produce economic benefits, but this is **only by God’s common grace** given human depravity
- And these codes of conduct will **constantly** tend toward economic **injustice and exploitation**

## 2. Is business conduct based on special revelation ethically superior to that based on general revelation?

- Think about the comprehensive, epistemological-ethical antithesis between belief and unbelief (1 Cor. 1-2; Matt. 11:25-27; Luke 10:21-22)
- When the world employs aspects of biblical principles in the world (“borrowed capital” such as 8th, 9th, 10th commandments), the likely outcome is positive
  - BUT -- this is, **conformity** to God’s law, **not true obedience** to it, so this does *not* make it “ethically superior”
- When believers create an ethic based **only** on general revelation, it is unbiblical and has no more promise than unbelievers’ efforts
- The Christian has received the only limit there is from human depravity -- God’s resurrecting, regenerating grace in Christ, the renewing presence of the Holy Spirit
- The only legitimate access to general revelation is **by faith** in the light of special revelation

*“The Scriptures are the indispensable ‘spectacles’ for **rightly** examining and perceiving the world about us, **essential for formulating sound business ethics**, among other things.”*

*(cont.)*

# (Continued)

Example application:

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 *“Those who buy should do so as if not theirs to keep, those who use the things of this world, as if not engrossed in them.”*

- Paul is writing between the resurrection and return of Christ
- Seemingly paradoxical, wherever this eschatological “as if not” controls the economic life of Christians, they will prove useful as economic guides, both in theory **and** in practice, for “this world in its present form” that is “passing away”

### 3. Does capitalism cater to human depravity?

- Any economic system is subject to exploitation by the deceit of the human heart
- No system is immune from this → **even if** private ownership and free markets are compatible or even demanded by biblical principles
  - “Anything (individual or corporate) dealing with the acquisition of profit carries an almost irresistible temptation to all sorts of economic manipulation and intimidation -- sometimes blatant but often refined, veiled even to the perpetrators themselves.”
    - Bible warns of love of money and dishonest gain especially in those who would be church leaders
    - Desire to be rich usually coexists with other vices working harm for others and self-destruction

“However else it is evaluated, capitalism abets the perverse inclination to secure ourselves rather than to serve others.”

Like any other economic system, it will remain an instrument of misery and confusion UNTIL it functions under the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the 3-stage program of economic renewal as announced in **Ephesians 4:28**:

1. *“Let the thief no longer steal,*
2. *But rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands,*
3. ***So that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”***

Application / Questions?