

Acts 14:1-18, God's Goodness and Omni-benevolence shown in His Common Grace to all people, 1 and His particular graces to the Elect.

Here in Acts 14 in Lystra and in Acts 17 in Athens where Paul speaks to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on Mars Hill, the Aereopagus, we have the two cases in the book of Acts where Luke records a presentation of God and the gospel that is packaged and delivered by the apostle in a very specific way for an exclusively Pagan audience. *Now why is that important?*

Because In both cases Paul expounds for them the doctrine of God's Common Grace to all people. *That is, God's goodness and his kindness and benevolence to all His creatures, regardless of their being believers or unbelievers (thus it is common to all – Common Grace).* Common grace is real, it is knowable by experience and the intellect, and it is a reasonable and clear apologetic for God's existence and even some of the key characteristics of the divine nature. That is, not just that the true and Living God *exists*, but much of what He's *like*. God's Common Grace and our experience of it as humans creates an incontrovertible apologetic for God. For the believer that is a great joy and comfort. And for the unbeliever the stewardship of that knowledge is part of what God uses to draw the elect, and will be a primary basis for severe judgment for those that reject and ignore God and so are subjects for examination at the Great White Throne judgment at the end of history.

Today, I'd like to invite you to explore with me a *prolegomena*, an introduction and quick overview of the general categories of God's wonderful graces gifted to us:

1. The first category of God's graces is what Bible students have called God's **Common grace** to all His creatures (regardless of their salvation status) simply because God is good and kind and he sheds his joy abroad. God's common grace includes but is not limited to what me might call General Revelation – Creation itself. The doctrine of common grace pertains to the sovereign grace of God the King of the Creation, bestowed upon all of mankind regardless of their [election](#). In other words, God has always bestowed His graciousness on all people in all parts of the earth at all times.
2. The second category of God's graces is in the **Special Revelation of the Scriptures**, in the sending of prophets and in miracles, and in the incarnation, the Son of God coming in human flesh of Jesus Christ.
3. The third category of God's graces is what we call *saving, sanctifying (or spiritual growth)*, and *keeping* graces. These graces are unique in that they operate in the midst of a subset of God's creatures, also know as His elect or chosen or called.

Today I hope you'll get some enjoyment and curiosity going as we focus in a bit on the 1st category: God's Common grace to all people, and then on the 3rd category: His saving, sanctifying and keeping graces for His children. We'll leave the 2nd category, Special

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Revelation, to feast on at another time. Also, our purpose today is not to scratch everywhere you might itch on these topics, but to get a good itch worked up, a real bothersome rash, and to show you that there are some very satisfying remedies that we can run down going forward from today. So we'll get you itching, and then show you that a bottle of Calamine lotion is available.

So let's explore the topic of God's Common Grace by looking at Acts 14, starting in v8.

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As we get down here to v15 thru 17 we see Paul directing their attention to the facts and the stewardship responsibilities they have in light of God's common grace to all mankind including the Lystrans.

You can also compare the very parallel approach Paul took with the Pagan philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts 17:22-31. Paul says, putting both speeches together, that their own experience of creation and their place in it, the weather, the rain, the boundaries of their habitation, the fact they live and breathe, even the impulse to reach beyond the physical and human experience worlds for the explanations behind it all.

Look at 17:25, “gives”, and 14:17, “gave” - this is the word *didomai* and it indicates an unmerited grace or a free giving of a gift by God to people, and irrespective of their spiritual standing in both these cases.

God's Common Grace has three (3) aspects:

The **first aspect** pertains to the favorable attitude of God toward all His creatures, not only toward the elect.

- Barnabas and Paul said to the Lycaonians “He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” ([Acts 14:17](#))
- In Acts 17 ²⁶ and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ (Athenagoras)
- “The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” ([Psalm 145:9](#)). Jesus said God causes “his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” ([Matthew 5:45](#)) and God “is kind to the

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ungrateful and wicked” ([Luke 6:35](#)). In addition to His compassion, goodness, and kindness, God also sheds His patience upon both the elect and the non-elect. While God’s patience for His own is undoubtedly different from His patience with those whom He has not chosen, God still exercises “longsuffering” toward those whom He has not chosen. In fact, every breath that the wicked man takes is an example of the active and personal mercy of our holy God toward that individual at each moment.

The **second aspect** of common grace is God's restraint of sin and its corrosive effects in the life of the individual, and in society as a whole. In other words, mankind individually, and collectively in culture, is not nearly as evil as he could or would be if he were left to his own devices!

- God intervenes and restrains individuals from sinning. In [Genesis 20](#), God *restrained* king Abimelech from touching Sarah, Abraham’s wife, and affirmed it to him in a dream by saying, “Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so *I have kept you from sinning* against me. That is why I did not let you touch her” ([Genesis 20:6](#)).
- Another example of God graciously restraining the wicked hearts of evil men is seen in God’s protection of the land of Israel from being invaded by the pagan nations on their border. God commanded the men of Israel that three times a year they would leave their plot of land to go and appear before Him ([Exodus 34:23](#)). To ensure the protection of God’s people from invasion during these times, even though the pagan nations surrounding them desired their land year-round, God promised that “no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord your God” ([Exodus 34:24](#)).
- God also graciously restrained David from taking revenge on Nabal for scorning the messengers that David sent to greet Nabal ([1 Samuel 25:14](#)). Abigail, Nabal’s wife, recognized God’s grace when she pleaded with David not to seek vengeance against her husband, “**since the Lord has kept you**, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands...” ([1 Samuel 25:26](#)). David acknowledged this truth by responding, “As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, **who has kept me from harming you...**” ([1 Samuel 25:34](#)).

This second aspect of God's common grace really shows up in sharp contrast in those moments and situations where God sovereignly releases it or removes his hand of grace, for His good purposes. When God hardens the hearts of individuals ([Exodus 4:21](#); [Joshua 11:20](#); [Isaiah 63:17](#)), He does so by releasing His restraint on their hearts, thereby giving them over to the sin that resides there (in this sense they harden their own

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hearts by God removing the restraints of grace that He had upon them. God actively removing His restraining grace and leaving them to their own devices of inevitable self-hardening is described as “God hardened their hearts”). In a similar way God gave wicked Israel, “over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices” ([Psalm 81:11-12](#)). The passage in the NT best known for speaking of God’s releasing of restraint upon large groups of people is [Romans 1](#) where Paul describes those who suppress the truth by their wickedness. God “gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another” ([Romans 1:28](#)).

The **third aspect** of common grace pertains to “civic or societal righteousness by the unregenerate.” This means that God, without regeneration of the heart, exercises upon people such gracious and benign influence that even the unsaved person is enabled to know and sense right and wrong, and perform real good deeds toward his fellow man. As Paul said of a group of unregenerate Gentiles, they “do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law” ([Romans 2:14](#)). One key aspect of Common Grace in this civic righteousness sense is the giving and authorizing of civil government by God. The necessity and actual operation of God graciously restraining the hearts of the unredeemed, and even the acts of the redeemed when walking in the flesh, becomes clear when we understand the biblical doctrine of [total depravity](#). If God did not restrain the evil that resides in the hearts of all men, hearts which are “deceitful and desperately wicked” ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)), by various means including (but not limited to) family structures, and governmental authority, humanity would have destroyed itself centuries ago.

God's common grace will be substantially withdrawn during the Great Tribulation and left to his own devices in a matter of just 7 years mankind enters a terminal dive into the worst depravity, worships Satan in the flesh as if he were the Messiah, and joins him in chasing Israel to the ends of the earth, and all this despite direct manifestations of supernatural origin in the sky, in the seas, in the animal kingdom, demons crawling physically out of the Abyss, in the miracles of the two witnesses, and so on. Christ finally returns in glory, power and massive judgment to terminate the irredeemably wicked kingdoms of those fallen men once and for all.

But because God thankfully generally works now through common grace given to all men, God’s sovereign plan for history is not thwarted by the evil hearts of man. In the doctrine of common grace, we see God’s purposes stand, His goodness and benevolence shown, mankind enjoys physical, emotional and societal blessings and even experiences flashes of moral, scientific, agricultural, cultural, relationship and political brilliance, and His elect people are also blessed, the church is helped, and His glory magnified.

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Now we can turn our attention to get a snapshot of just some (not all – we don't have time) of the special graces of God pertaining to salvation, spiritual growth, and the keeping graces. That is, those graces of God that apply to us the alien righteousness, merits and accomplishments and the atonement of Jesus Christ the Son of God, to make us and to keep us a child of God, to grant us God's eternal life, to grow us spiritually, and deliver us surely and finally into the kingdom to come in great glory.

Let's look at these three general categories of special graces as they apply to us as believers.

- 1. The first grace of God as it applies to those who are saved or will be saved occurred before the universe or any of us existed.** It occurred before there were angels. It occurred in eternity past. In the being of God, among the Father, Son and Spirit there was an election! Not for which of them was best, but for bringing people that did not yet exist into salvation and even completeness their conformity to the image of Christ.

Take a look at Ephesians 1:3-6 and 2 Thess 2:13, 2 Tim 2:10, also Mark 13:20 (Tribulation saints)

- 2. The next grace of God is the giving and hearing of the Word of God.** Romans 10:17
- 3. This is part of the general call of the gospel (John 3:16) which goes out to all its hearers (elect and unelect).** It works alongside the general work of the Holy Spirit per John 16:8
- 4. The effectual call of the Holy Spirit.** The effectual call applies the knowledge of God from Common Grace, the general convicting work of the Spirit per John 15:8, and the specific knowledge of God from the Word and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only sufficient savior. The Spirit works in the mind of the elect and uses these to bring conviction of the truth about oneself and about the need for and sufficiency of the Savior. See 2 Tim 2:25 and 2 Peter 1:3. The Spirit also frees the will that is bound in darkness and illumines the mind so that the mind can and does see the facts and the truth and the will is freed from bondage so that it freely and infallibly, without coercion, itself heeds the wisdom of Scripture and wills to turn to Christ and His promises. John 6:44
- 5. By the grace of God, Saving faith** is exercised as a result of the will being freed and turning to Christ. Eph 2:4-9 And we are seated positionally with Christ in the heavenlies, with a view to the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness!

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6. We are forever **graciously sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit**. Eph 1:13, Eph 4:30

Sanctifying/Spiritual Growth graces.

1. We are **indwelt irrevocably** by the same Spirit. 2 Cor 1:22
2. We are granted/gifted sonship to God and **the Spirit bears inner witness to and with us** that we belong to God. Romans 8:15-16, Gal 4:4-6
3. We are, based on the foreknowledge of election from step 1, **conformed to the image of the Son**. Romans 8:29
4. We are being **transformed into the image of Christ**. 2 Cor 3:18

Keeping graces.

1. **We and our inheritance are kept, preserved unto the day of final salvation** from the *presence of sin*. 1Pet. 1:3-5

And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,⁹ obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:8-9