

Common Grace in Work

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[0:00] Well, we are continuing our study on work. Last week we talked about how Jesus is to be the center of everything, and that includes work.

! He's the compass that orients our work, that orients our life, and everything is different because Jesus is Lord. The gospel comes to us in a very personal way. It comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And as we apply the gospel to our lives, we find that Jesus changes everything. Because of him, we have a new audience. We don't serve man, we serve the Lord.

A new motivation, we're looking for him to reward us. So we have a new reward and a new protection. We can entrust ourselves to him because he is our Lord.

So that's something of what we talked about last week. And we haven't had a chance yet in this class to stop and for me to take some feedback from you.

[1:07] And I thought that's what we could do this morning, just for this first part. And I wanted to ask if you had any comments about anything in this series.

Any ways that this has helped you. Any way that maybe it's convicted you. Any ideas how we can work this out. As I've said, this is one of those hard things that it takes some real wrestling with.

How it can work itself out in our lives in particular. Because our jobs are so different. Our situations are so different. So any ideas of how we could work these things out.

What has challenged you? What has encouraged you? So I'm not looking for any particular order.

I'm just looking for you to tell us what has God been teaching you through this series on work.

Feel free to speak up. First person can be really brave. Yes, Dennis.

[2:13] Dennis. Yeah, I realized that when I got the current job that I have that it was a gift from God. I felt that it was.

But I didn't often look upon Christ as my actual employer. It's the one I was doing my work for. And this series helped me to connect it to the fact that my job is from the Lord.

And that I'm working for him that he is my employer. And so all that I do, I try to do to please him more than my physical employer.

Because I feel like if I'm pleasing him, I'll be pleasing my physical employer as well. Very good. Very good. What else?

I appreciated the reminder that not only are we serving the Lord, but work is a call of service to others.

[3:09] And I need to look at each day as an opportunity to show love and service through my work. Very good.

Roger. This whole series is reminding me of a lesson that just took years and years and years for me to learn. I've been in the service industry for like over 20 years working on machines.

And I'd have a broken copier and I'd go up to the machine and I'd look at the machine and I'd look at the people around me. And I'd say, what did you do to my baby? It would be such a mess. And all these repairs are needed to us.

And it's so funny because like Adam Tremko on our card, it said, they gave me a title. I never understood the title. It said, customer engineer. And I said, what does that mean?

And over time, I come to realize that every place that I go to, there are just broken machines.

There's broken people. And there's people that, we have no idea what's going on in their family.

[4:12] I mean, they could have kids that are on drugs. They could have broken marriages. They could have difficulties. And they carry that to work with them. And sometimes the reaction they give you is just a carryover.

You know, and I'm learning, well, you don't take anything that they say bad personally. You know, and you go there and the focus has to be off of just the function of doing the work, which you want to do.

But you look at people that you're having to deal with and trying to relate with them. And it's short a time you've got to, you know, to minister to them.

That's part of the job, man. For years, that wasn't my job. My job was to fix these machines. You know, it's what people were doing that were interrupting and putting, you know, things in the spokes of my wheel to slow me down.

So you were a copy engineer or a copy machine engineer. And you're learning to be a customer engineer. Customer engineer. Still not a very good title, I guess.

[5:18] Yes, but. Yes, dear. I was encouraged because so often we did the work outside the home.

And you mentioned, like, mothers and young children and all that. And I've been so encouraged because as we've gone through different phases in life, like the kids leave, and I would pray and the Lord would say, you know, I was praying, what do you want me to do now?

And even though it wasn't working outside the home, he provides and he shows and he leads. And the principles are the same, no matter if you're just involved in the neighborhood, that is your responsibility in your job.

And it's just been a blessing to go over these principles and see again how they apply in the home life, not just in the workplace. Yeah. And that's a good point because obviously these, I mean, we've sort of been emphasizing workplace, but for mothers, for all of us, we have a place of work even if we're not making money.

Yeah, retirees, empty nests. Yeah. We never get to retire, ever, really. Even in heaven. We get to rest, but even in rest we'll have work to do.

[6:37] What else? Yeah, Roger. I think I'm following that up as well. I've appreciated the emphasis on the abilities, gifts that I have, or a gift from God.

And even at this stage of my life, it's not like I've been set aside. I'm still exploring, okay, what are those gifts? How can they be used at this transition point in my life to accomplish his purposes?

But then also looking at, say, grandchildren, helping them think along the same lines of what you did is real good. You know, how were you able to do that?

You know, what gifts, abilities has God given you that you'll be able to use now in our family and even beyond our family with other people. But then another point in the book I thought was interesting is that's true even of unsafe people.

They got their skills and abilities from God, the common grace of God, providence of God, and how he works even through them in providing for all of his creatures.

[7:47] Certainly they don't acknowledge him as the giver of those gifts, but still that's God's goodness seen every day even through unsafe people. Yeah.

That's actually what we're going to talk about later, common grace. What else can we... Yes, Stan? I appreciate the challenge of, you know, there's many things that I find very easy to take joy in.

You know, certainly if somebody, my manager asks me to do something for him and I do it, and he says, hey, thanks, this is exactly what I needed. You know, that simple of fine joy because, you know, there's... I've met what it is he's asked of me, but I think this has helped me to look at it from a broader perspective, certainly not for any human recognition, but just in the mundane day-to-day things.

I can take joy in, you know, a bank account that reconciles our system. I mean, there's a list. You can go through and just say, you know what, it has nothing to do with what people expect of me and why I'm working for them.

But just as part of my job, things that the Lord is my employer. See, it's my ultimate employer.

Things he sees, I can take joy in. And the other thing that's been a challenge, too, is certainly we all see, we work with people who are unsaved and we see the broken world, not just for unbelievers, but the world in general.

[9:03] You know, we're waiting for our Savior to come. And the challenge to see salvation in the midst of all that. You know, not to be surprised or depressed that things are broken and that relationships are broken and that customers are broken and that we're broken.

Not to be depressed or surprised by that at all, but instead to put our hope in Jesus Christ as our Savior. That's been just a huge thing. I like that point about, I mean, I like everything you said. I like that point especially about taking joy even when your boss doesn't recognize your work. Isn't that a wonderful thing that because Jesus sees everything that you're doing, that opens up whole new vistas of where we can get joy.

As we do a good job, we can thank the Lord and take joy even when no one else sees it. Moms, you can take joy in what you do even when no one else praises you if you're serving the Lord. What else could we say? What else have you learned or encouraged or challenged with? What else have you learned? What else have you learned? What else have you learned? What else have you learned?

[10:21] What else have you learned? Yes, Steve. The culture we live in and the negative bias and the negative outlook on work, it's been very good to have come here and hear.

We have to work as a good thing and work as a good thing. God has designed us to work and then going back out to the workplace and move with something in hand to counteract that.

I live in the weekend mentality. And this is what God has given me to do as a gift. And without it, I would be in a bad way.

And without a gift, it's been a gift. It's been a gift to have that to counteract what we're learning today. Good. Yes, Mark. Good. Yes, Mark.

The thing that impressed me the most was the fact that our work either fits into the self-salvation story of the world or the gospel story of God's salvation.

[11:43] God's salvation either fits into one of those two areas. And even the positive-looking goals of non-Christians, if they're not aimed at placing the Lord and fitting into his story, that they end up being exercises in idolatry ultimately.

They're serving their own God. They're serving themselves. And even if it involves great creativity and a desire for unity and all of these things that they shout for at the Tower of Abel, it's all pointless ultimately.

Yeah, it gives us a very broad view of life, doesn't it? Well, I think that's really all the time we have. I really do appreciate everything you've said.

I think God has given all of you gifts and minds. It's good for us to hear from each other. Just going off of what Mark just said and just how comprehensive the gospel is and how we either fit our work into the self-salvation story, it's about saving myself somehow, or it fits into the gospel story.

I was reading Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones this past week, and he said this in one place, and I wanted to share this with you because this is where we need to bring our work to.

[13:30] This is where we need to get our understanding from. This is what he said. The gospel is not something partial or piecemeal. It takes in the whole life, the whole of history, the whole world.

It is complete. It is a complete whole view of life, and many are unhappy in the Christian life because they've never realized that this way of life caters to the whole man's life and covers every eventuality in his experiences.

Now, I'm going to stop there for a second. Are you unhappy in your work, Christian? Are you unhappy in your work? Well, we could say a lot of reasons, but maybe one reason is that you haven't yet learned to bring the gospel into this story.

That's what he says. Many people are unhappy in the Christian life because they don't bring the gospel into their life. They don't see how it applies. There's no aspect of life but that the gospel has something to say about it.

The whole of life must come under its influence because it is all-inclusive. The gospel is meant to control and govern everything in our lives.

[14:42] We must realize the greatness of the gospel, its vast, eternal span. We must dwell more on the riches and in the riches of these great doctrinal absolutes.

And that's what I think we've been saying. We must learn to dwell in the riches and on the riches of Jesus Christ. If we're going to do our work in a gospel-centered way.

Now, we're ready to move on today. And as I said, we're going to talk about common grace. And this is a very important topic for us to understand.

Because if all we think about is, if all we consider is, well, the gospel, it gives me the reasons I do things.

Jesus Christ is at the center of everything. He's the only one that gives meaning, etc., etc. And we leave out this idea of common grace. Then we're leaving out a chunk of the Bible.

[15:46] And what that's going to do is it's going to leave us handicapped, unable to deal with reality in a lot of ways. And so, if that's primarily and only the way we think about it, then it's going to be easy for us to start thinking that non-Christians can't do good work.

Or that everything a Christian does at their job is somehow completely and obviously different. Or it should be completely and obviously different than what a non-believer does.

And that's just not true. And when we try to look at, well, my job needs to be completely different than that of my non-believing neighbor, we run into a wall.

We run into questions that we can't answer, that we can't deal with. And so, if we don't talk about common grace, it leaves us wondering and asking all these impossible questions. Like, what am I supposed to think about the unbelievers' work?

How can I work with them? Is it right for me to work with them? Is it right for me to work under them? How do I enjoy, or why do I enjoy working with them so much?

[17:01] Why do they do better at their work than I do sometimes? The fact is that sometimes non-Christians do do a better job than Christians do at their work.

They're more talented. They're more useful. They're more helpful than Christians. And it's not because... It just can't be that I'm...

Just because I'm a Christian dentist, that I'm a better dentist than a non-Christian dentist. It's not that simple. And we can't belittle the work that non-Christians do.

And the reason is, is because there is this thing called common grace. And that's what we're going to talk about. Now, here's the definition of common grace. It's from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology.

And this is what he says. Common grace is the grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation.

[18:02] So it's common. It's common to all men. It's not restricted to believers or to the elect only. Common grace is distinct from saving grace.

Common grace does not end in salvation. Saving grace results in salvation. Common grace is for everybody. Saving grace is for believers.

To the elect only. The elect in Christ. Common grace is from God's goodness. From just his general good character. His goodness. But saving grace flows directly.

Not to exclude his goodness. But it is the result of Christ's work. Everything that we receive in salvation comes through Jesus Christ.

Common grace, on the other hand, does not come directly through Jesus Christ. Although in a certain sense, the only reason that anyone can receive grace, common grace, is because the elect have not been brought in.

[19:11] Salvation is not yet complete. Salvation is not yet complete. So that's a definition. Common grace. It's God's goodness to all men. Now, does the Bible teach it?

Does the Bible teach it? Well, let's look at three passages. Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 28. Isaiah 28. Isaiah 28. Isaiah 28. Isaiah 28.

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I think we could look at more, but I just want to look at these three. Isaiah 28. And we're going to begin reading at verse 23.

Isaiah 28, 23. And see if you can see common grace in this passage. Listen and hear my voice.

[20:07] Pay attention and hear what I say. When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? So does he just keep plowing and plowing and plowing and plowing?

Farmers, is that how it works? You just hook up your plow and you just plow and plow all year round. Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin?

Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cumin.

Caraway is beaten out with a rod and cumin with a stick. Grain must be ground to make bread. So one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it.

All this comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom. Now the point here is, and this might be lost on us because we're pretty much in a post-agricultural society. [21 : 17] We maybe not even know what he's talking about here. But the point here is that farmers know how to farm. Farmers just don't take a plow and plow all day.

Eventually they sow. And then when the sowing is done, they handle the grain in a particular way in order to bring food to the table. Now Isaiah says that anyone who becomes a skillful farmer, who knows how and when to plant and sow and thresh and so forth, is actually taught.

By whom? God. Because God instructs them and teaches them the right way. Verse 29, all this comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel, magnificent in wisdom.

Now, so where does wisdom for planting and harvesting come from? It comes from the Lord. And this is important to realize that in the Bible, farming, gardening, is the prototypical work.

It's the work that stands for all the work that we do because Adam and Eve were first gardeners. And so we can't limit this to just farming. We have to say that every advancement in learning, every work of art, every innovation in health care or technology or management or governance, is God instructing the minds of men.

[22 : 47] So Thomas Edison, he was a great inventor. I don't think he was a Christian. As far as I know, he wasn't. But God used him to bless all of mankind.

So here we are, sitting under these light bulbs. He blessed Edison. And he gave him wisdom and he gave him ideas. And so these light bulbs that we sit under, that we don't even think about, is God's goodness to you.

Can you think? I mean, isn't that amazing? The second passage, you don't have to turn there, is James 1.17. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

God is unchangeably good. And he's like a son. And out of him pours goodness. And every good and perfect gift comes from him.

So is there something good out there in the world? It came from God. His blessings fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. The sunshine of his goodness just doesn't fall on the believer's house.

[24 : 06] It falls on everyone's house. So every act of goodness, wisdom, justice, beauty, every good law, every honest police officer, every talented artist, every skillful doctor, every kind mother, they're all gifts.

They're all enabled by God. They're all forms of grace. Let's turn back to Exodus chapter 31. This is our third passage. And maybe you already know what this one is about. Exodus 31. And we'll read just the first five verses.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Where does artistic skill come from?

It comes from the first artist. It comes from him. So who's behind all the great works of painting and sculpture? Who's behind all the skilled craftsmen?

[25 : 43] It's God. And so through common grace, God blesses all people. And through common grace, he provides for all people. And so as Christians, we should value all human work.

All good human work. Not work just done by Christians. Because all good work is a channel of God's goodness and God's love to humanity, to the world.

So does the Bible teach common grace? Yes. Now, I want to think through some implications. We don't have a lot of time, but here's four.

First, this should humble us before God. One, we don't deserve God to be this good to us. See, God's grace doesn't only come to us through Jesus Christ.

It comes from all directions. And obviously, Jesus is the highest and the best. And without him, everything else would eventually be meaningless. But this should humble us before God.

[26 : 49] God is even better than we tend to think that he is. And so we can't put fences around God's goodness because it's going to burst out of all those fences.

We can't say, oh, he's not good. He won't be good to those people or these people. He's better than we can imagine him to be. So remember a couple weeks ago, we talked about that movie Amadeus with Mozart, those two composers.

Antonio, Salieri, and Mozart. And in that movie, the reason Salieri, remember, he hated Mozart.

And the reason he hated him so much was because God gave him better and greater gifts. He gave Mozart greater gifts than he gave Salieri.

But it wasn't just that. Maybe he could have lived with that. But what made it so bad was that, at least in the movie, Mozart is this morally despicable person.

[27:57] Well, Salieri thinks he's a pretty good person. He thinks, here I am. And this is what he says. I want to make music to your glory. I want to make this wonderful music to honor you.

And meanwhile, Mozart is a drunk and he's promiscuous. And when he makes music, according to the movie, you hear the voice of God. You hear God and his glory coming through.

And Salieri says, it's not right. It's not fair. Well, Salieri is blind to his own sinfulness, isn't he? But he's also blind to common grace.

He wants to confine God's goodness just to people who are morally good. But God's grace is always unmerited.

Common grace or saving grace, it's always unmerited. And it's always free. It goes where he wants it to go. And the reason we aren't living in caves and slitting each other's throats is because God is good to us.

[29:08] And we don't deserve any better. Now, that should humble us before God. Second implication, that should humble us before man. Can unbelievers teach us how to work?

How to do good work? How to work better? Do unbelievers sometimes work better than Christians? Yes. And here's the reason why. It's common grace.

So when we see that, that allows us to learn from them. And that allows us to appreciate their work. Because to ignore their work, when it is good to ignore it, to belittle it, is to ignore God's work.

It's to ignore God's goodness. It's to be blind to God's love and grace to all men. This is what John Calvin wrote. Let that admirable light of truth shining in them.

He's talking about unbelievers. Let that light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts.

[30:22] If we regard the spirit of God as the soul fountain of truth, we will never reject the truth, nor despise it where it appears, unless we want to dishonor the spirit of God.

There's something very subtle going on here when you can't appreciate a non-Christian's work. And I think it's a form of self-righteousness.

You think, I have what I have, and I'm good at my work because of what I've done and who I am. But Calvin is saying, wherever truth shines, wherever goodness shines, it's from the spirit of God. And so when you belittle God's work in them, you aren't only belittling them, you're belittling God, and you're dishonoring the spirit of God who gives grace to all.

See, the problem is a self-righteousness. It's a self-sufficiency. It's a failure to see that everything you have and everything anyone has is from God.

[31:34] Now, here's the third implication. We should be thankful for God's grace in their lives. We should be thankful for lawyers and doctors and hardworking customer service people.

Now, some people might think that we should only go to Christian doctors, Christian lawyers, Christian artists. But seeing God's common grace should make us think about retreating into a Christian ghetto, where all the people that we know, all the people that we work for, all the people that we work with are Christians.

Because, again, that's to be blind to common grace. So think about all the good work that non-Christians do. They fix cars. They make cars.

They make telephones. They probably made the chairs that you're sitting on. Are you enjoying those chairs? They grow your food. They keep crime at bay.

They deal out justice. They protect our country. We can be thankful for what God does in them. Yes, they do it for their own reasons. They do it for wrong reasons.

[32:40] They do it for wrong salvation reasons. But that still does not take away the fact that God's goodness is coming to us through them, and so we should be thankful. Fourth implication.

It means that we can work with others, even non-believers, to do good work. And, again, this is related to retreating into a Christian ghetto, where all the people I know are Christians.

All the people that I work with are Christians. I only think about Christians. We can work with others to do good. Is there a place for all kinds of people and groups to work together to make sure food is available to the world's poorest?

To make sure that clean water, to pick up a huge mess in the Philippines is going on now. Is there a place to work together to make better cities, better companies, a better way of life, safer streets?

Yes. And the reason is because when we work together with them, we're not just embracing. We're not necessarily embracing their wrong ideas and their wrong worldview.

[33:56] We are embracing that God is still at work in them, and He's still doing good through them. We aren't betraying our Christian brothers. We aren't betraying the church. We are embracing the reality that, to some extent, God is at work in everyone's life some way.

Now, we have to draw this to a close. We're out of time. But I want to put last week, or last couple weeks, and this week together. And so we can say, yes, Christians, we have a unique worldview. It defines us. It shapes us. It means that we're going to be different. We're going to do things differently. We're going to have to challenge this world. Sometimes we're going to have to stay away from this world. Sometimes we're going to have to confront the world because of our unique worldview.

But on the other hand, because of common grace, there's still room for you to enjoy, to learn, to praise God for the work that He's doing through unbelievers.

Well, that's all the time we have. We're dismissed.