

# We Believe in the Holy Spirit

Lesson 2

In the World

Forum



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# Contents

Question 1:	What role did the Holy Spirit play during the creation week in Genesis 1?.....	1
Question 2:	How does the Holy Spirit, as a person of the Godhead, interact with God’s creation? .....	2
Question 3:	Why does the Holy Spirit provide good things for unbelievers as well as believers? .....	3
Question 4:	How does the Holy Spirit providentially influence kings, nations and politics? .....	4
Question 5:	What role does the Holy Spirit play in revelation? .....	5
Question 6:	How did the Holy Spirit interact with human authors to write Scripture? ..	7
Question 7:	What’s the difference between illumination and inspiration? .....	8
Question 8:	How do illumination and inward leading from the Holy Spirit help us interpret God’s revelation to us? .....	9
Question 9:	Why does the Gospel of John often refer to Jesus’ miracles as “signs”? ..	10
Question 10:	What is common grace? .....	11
Question 11:	Why do fallen, unsaved human beings still exhibit truthfulness, goodness and beauty?.....	12
Question 12:	What are some ways that the Holy Spirit restrains evil and promotes goodness in humanity at large?.....	13
Question 13:	Why does the Holy Spirit nurture and provide for the lives of sinners who will never come to faith?.....	14
Question 14:	How should the fact that God gives common grace to unbelievers as well as believers impact the way we evaluate our surrounding culture? ..	15

# We Believe in the Holy Spirit

## Lesson Two: In the World

### Forum

With

Dr. Danny Akin  
Dr. Gregg R. Allison

Dr. P. J. Buys  
Dr. David Correa, D.Min.

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Dr. J. Scott Horrell  
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Dr. Glenn R. Kreider  
Dr. Dan Lacich  
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Dr. John McKinley  
Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail  
Dr. Jeffrey J. Niehaus

Dr. Greg Perry  
Dr. Mark Saucy  
Rev. Canon Alfred Sebahene,  
Ph.D.  
Dr. Simon Vibert  
Dr. Lin Yuan I

### Question 1:

## What role did the Holy Spirit play during the creation week in Genesis 1?

### Dr. Danny Akin

You know, any time we think about creation I think we need to think in Trinitarian category because when you examine the Bible there's clearly a role given to the Father, the Son *and* the Holy Spirit. And you think in particular of Genesis 1: "In the beginning God created..." But then the Scriptures very quickly note the Spirit was hovering over the waters, hovering over the material that would then be shaped and formed into the world in which we live. I often say it like this: I believe God can be viewed as the *author* of creation; the Son can be viewed as the *architect* of creation — Colossians 1 certainly emphasizes that — and then the Holy Spirit is the *administrator*. He's the one that actually gets involved in shaping and molding things, at least that seems to be what Genesis 1 is telling us. So, I think a healthy view of creation is going to involve all members of the triune God, seeing that each one of them has a particular assignment, with Genesis 1 making it clear it is the Spirit who's very much active in shaping and molding and bringing things together.

### Dr. J. Scott Horrell

The Spirit's not mentioned much in Genesis 1, other than verse 2, of course, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and then there was that deep dark emptiness, "and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters." Well, that's about all we're told, really, as then, in verse 3, God speaks and there is light, and God speaks as we go through the different days. And yet, as we look at other places in the Old Testament, we see the Spirit was there as well. Again, Isaiah 40, the stars and all that's created there. One of my favorite verses actually is Psalm 33:6: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made ... and by the breath" — really, *ruach*, "spirit" — "of his mouth, all their starry hosts." So, here you have both *dabar*, the "word," and the *ruach*, the "spirit," together in creation. So, typically it's seen that, from other

verses as well, that the Holy Spirit is the one, in many ways, giving life and beauty to the universe, but not too much is said in Genesis 1. That is inferred as we see other Scriptures and look back.

## **Question 2:** **How does the Holy Spirit, as a person of the Godhead, interact with God's creation?**

### **Dr. Mark Saucy**

As a person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the person who is distinct in his application or his point of contact with the creation... But all throughout the Scriptures, you see that that is what the Spirit is doing; God touches us by the Spirit. Jesus, when he speaks about the kingdom being present in the Spirit, in his ministry, he uses the imagery of the finger of God, and the hand of God, and the arm of God are all metaphor for the Spirit in touching where God is present, effectively present in the creation.

### **Dr. P. J. Buys**

We read in Genesis 1:2 that the Holy Spirit was hovering over the face of the waters. Now, we need to keep in mind that the word "beginning" ... suggests that it has been selected because of its association with the end. The Bible makes it clear that everything that is happening, the Holy Spirit is involved and included, especially when it becomes clear that everything that has gone wrong with the Fall, that the Holy Spirit will be the perfecter, and that he is the first deposit of God's great new creation. As the perfecter, he's moving towards the end, the eschaton. And God has ... superintended the condition of the earth, and preparing the way for the new creation, and the Holy Spirit is deeply involved in that as the perfecter.

### **Dr. John McKinley**

We look for what the Father, Son and Spirit are doing, and we don't have as much clarity about the Holy Spirit, so we wonder, what is his role, particularly in creation, because there's a lot said about him touching creation and indwelling people and acting in particular ways. And so, the general principle seems to be that he is the agent of the three that are the Triune God that touches creation. So, any work that God is going to do in creation is the Spirit's job. So, God speaks to create, but it's the Spirit who is hovering over the face of the deep. God saves us, but it's the Spirit who applies that to us. Jesus comes to us and won't leave us as orphans, but it's the Spirit who is going to indwell us. And God sanctifies us, but it's the Spirit who is the one who comes in. So, it seems to be that when God works in creation, it's the Spirit's job as the one who carries that out. He is the doer of the works of God and can be spoken of in a generic way in the Old Testament — "The Spirit of God does this and this" — and then the New Testament gives more personality, where he has a masculine pronoun, that is making choices, and he is relating to us, and he is sent on mission by

the Father and the Son to come in and work with us. So, in some ways he is the one that we encounter the most among the three. The Father is very much God over us, the Son is God with us by incarnation, but the Spirit is God in us to work and be nearest to us.

### **Question 3:**

## **Why does the Holy Spirit provide good things for unbelievers as well as believers?**

### **Dr. Mike Fabarez**

Psalm 145 speaks to the fact that God is good to all of his creation, and it works through that particular song, talking about not only us as human beings but the earth itself, the creatures on the earth. God is a good God, and he's good to everyone in some way... God is the sustainer of life. As it says in Job, the idea of the Spirit of God is the agency giving life to all people. And so, in that sense, the Holy Spirit is the agency bringing life and all the things that come with that — enjoyment, just the everyday experiences of good, that James said, “Don't be deceived. All the good things are coming from God through the agency of the Holy Spirit.” And in that sense, perhaps, it clarifies a very confusing statement where Paul writes to Timothy and says that God is the Savior of all men, but especially those who believe. That's a reference to the common grace of God. He is in the process of sustaining, and the process of upholding and doing good to all people. And in that sense, he saves them. He saves them from all kinds of bad things. And yet, for us of course, those who are redeemed, those who are his children, he is good to us in a very special way.

### **Dr. John McKinley**

We wonder what God is doing and how he is treating people, depending on a response to him, and clearly he's doing some things that are different for believers compared to unbelievers. But it's also clear that the Holy Spirit is doing good to all, because many people are able to experience love and good things in life. And then we have statements that we categorize as “common grace,” where God gives rain to the just and the unjust, and so we should treat people well also. The reason for the Holy Spirit to do these kinds of good things is that he is using them to call people to seek for God, and it is an expression of God's love, and it is unrecognized. I think we should locate common grace as things that God does, and it's the Holy Spirit's role to carry that out, that he is the agent bringing this grace to bear on us. It doesn't save anybody, but it is an expression of God's love that people should thank him for, but they just don't recognize.

### **Dr. Greg Perry**

In the creation account, we read that God breathed life into the man that he formed from the dust of the ground. That word, *ruach*, means “spirit” as well, that God's Spirit was breathed into man. And so, what we see from the beginning is that God's

Spirit animates every human life. So, it shouldn't surprise us that God's wisdom appears even in human wisdom traditions in every culture. And so, in the book of Proverbs, for example, we have wisdom incorporated, even from Egypt, into the wisdom of God. Isaiah writes how even the farmer is taught by God in the process of harvesting and threshing his grains to prepare bread. And yet, we learn also that human beings, in our rebellion against God, suppress the truth that is evident — the wisdom of God that's evident in every culture and every person — we push it down because we're in rebellion against God and against God's wisdom. We want to define good and evil on our own terms... So, Jesus explained to his disciples in the Upper Room Discourse in John 16 that he would send a Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would convict the world — unbelievers as well as believers — of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. So, in God's mercy, the Spirit not only animates the created order, and even every human being with the wisdom of God, but even when we suppress God's wisdom the Spirit is there to convict us of God's truth and to invite us, summon us even, back into a relationship with God.

#### **Question 4:**

### **How does the Holy Spirit providentially influence kings, nations and politics?**

#### **Dr. P. J. Buys**

We must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit controls the minds and hearts of kings and rulers. We read these interesting words in the book of Ezra 6:22:

**The Lord ... had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to [the people of Israel], so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel (Ezra 6:22, ESV).**

So, in his providence, God the Holy Spirit led the king of Assyria to assist the people of Israel in the restoration of the temple. Same thing in 7:27 where we read,

**Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king (Ezra 7:27, ESV).**

When the kings of Israel were anointed with oil, it was a sign that the Holy Spirit came on them to lead them to bless God's people. Sometimes God allows evil spirits to rule over the lives of kings and rulers, and sometimes that is part of his discipline over his own people.

#### **Dr. Jeffrey J. Niehaus**

There is naturally, in human affairs, the question of authority and where it comes from. Romans 13 makes it very clear that all authority comes from above... There are two issues, of course. There is positional authority and there is anointing which gives

authority. And so, let's look at 1 Kings 18, for instance, where Ahab is king. So, he has that positional authority... When Elijah confronts him and starts calling the shots about, you know, "Assemble the prophets of Baal and Asherah, and let's have this contest on Mt. Carmel," you read that chapter; Elijah is calling all the shots. So, he has the spiritual authority, the anointing... But if you look, then, beyond that into the pagan world even of those days, Isaiah 45 is probably the best example. Isaiah 45:1, the Lord through Isaiah refers to the pagan king Cyrus as my messiah, my *mashiach*, my anointed. And in the Old Testament that only meant one thing: You were anointed by the Spirit. The prophet Samuel anointed Saul with oil, the Spirit came on him. He anointed David with oil, the Spirit came on him. Even in James 5, somebody's sick you anoint them with oil and pray for their healing. Well, the symbolism is the same. You anoint with oil, but you hope the Spirit will come and do some extra work and heal the person. But it's made very clear in Isaiah 45 that this pagan king, Cyrus, has the anointing of the Holy Spirit. That means the Holy Spirit gave him wisdom to conquer Babylon, to administer an empire, also the guidance to return God's people to their homeland. And yet he can say to him, "I've given you all this, but you don't know me"... And so, the point is made that a pagan king, a pagan ruler, can have the anointing of God's Spirit moving him to do things, giving him wisdom. He may not even know God.

#### **Pastor Raymond Massaad, translation**

In the book of Proverbs, it says these wonderful words: "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." Wherever God's will is, he turns the kings' hearts. That's why ... in our current day, we should never worry about what happens in politics. We should never worry about plans that are made behind the scenes because we know that God has the upper hand. He can do anything, and he knows every plan, and he manages everything, and everything goes according to his will, despite the evil we see in the world, despite the depravity we see in the world, despite everything we see intruding on the world. Especially these days, we see a lot of things that shock us. Sometimes even believers wonder why God allows these things. But God knows. He has a plan. God has a purpose. We don't know God's plan or purpose, but God is directly involved in everything until the time comes when God will lift his hand in the last days, when God will pour out his judgment on human beings. But right now, God has a mighty hand in people's lives. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all work together in the world, in the believers, through the leaders, in every human being, in order that his will is done in all the earth.

### **Question 5:**

#### **What role does the Holy Spirit play in revelation?**

#### **Dr. Simon Vibert**

The Holy Spirit plays a significant role in revelation throughout Scripture. We meet

him first in Genesis 1, hovering over the waters, deeply involved in creation. We also, in the New Testament, hear of the Spirit involved in the inspiration of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is God-breathed” — “God-spirited,” out of God’s very being; the words of God come by the Spirit of God. And the Holy Spirit, of course, is at work within individual people, opening their blind eyes to grasp that the God who made this world actually makes himself clearer and supremely known in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And by the Spirit, we come to understand who Jesus is and put our faith in him.

**Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail, translation**

The Holy Spirit has a primary role in divine revelation. The Father reveals himself through his Son. The Son is the news; the Son is the message; the Son is, as we see in John 1, the *Logos*. He is, we can say, the *content* of the revelation. But the Holy Spirit is the one who communicates this content to us. If Christ is the Word, there are hints in Scripture that the Holy Spirit is the divine voice who brings the Word to us... Without the Holy Spirit, it’s like a person is talking to us who has the ability to speak, but with no voice, without the power to communicate his message to our ears... The Lord Jesus Christ, in John 3, compares the Holy Spirit to the wind, and he says that we don’t know from where the wind comes, but we hear its sound. The Holy Spirit is the sound who gave us inspiration, and he is the sound who communicates to us the knowledge of the Father and the knowledge of the Son. In 1 Corinthians 2 it says,

**For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:11, ESV).**

The Holy Spirit absolutely knows the Father. That’s why he’s able to give us inspiration and the knowledge of the Father and the Son. For he searches everything, and has a primary role in the revelation process, which is shared by the Father, and shared by the Son, and also shared by the Holy Spirit.

**Dr. Danny Akin**

You know, revelation is a gift that God has given us both in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, what we call the Living Word, and then what he has given us in Scripture, which we call the written Word. And in 2 Peter 1:20-21, the Bible’s very clear about the role that the Holy Spirit plays in the doctrine of revelation. Of course, 2 Timothy says, “All Scripture is God-breathed.” Well, how did God do that? Well, Peter tells us that holy men of God spoke as they were moved, or picked up, or carried along, by the Holy Spirit, which is why I like to say of the Bible, the Bible is the Word of God written in the words of men. These men, though, were guided and superintended in such a way that using their own unique personalities and their individuality, they wrote exactly what God wanted them to write because they were being cared for, they were being guided by the Holy Spirit. And as a result of that, that’s why we can have great confidence that what they wrote is exactly what a God of truth wanted us to have. And since he’s a God of truth, then there is the natural deduction that the Bible is indeed the very truthful, faithful, reliable, trustworthy

word of God.

### **Question 6:**

## **How did the Holy Spirit interact with human authors to write Scripture?**

**Dr. Gregg R. Allison**

In 2 Peter 1:21, Peter says that:

[Scripture] was [never] produced by the will of man but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21, ESV).

The Holy Spirit was superintending the biblical authors, carrying them along, moving them along, bearing them along. The metaphor is a beautiful one of wind catching a sail of a sailboat and moving it along. In a similar way, the Spirit bore along, carried along the biblical authors as they were writing so that they produced God's revelation to us — Scripture. The Spirit acted in such a way, superintending, overseeing the biblical authors, such that they were the ones who actually wrote Scripture, employing their personality, their theological perspectives, their writing styles, their grammar, their expressiveness. The Spirit did not nullify or negate any of that, but worked in them as they were writing so that the Spirit and the biblical authors came together in cooperating to produce God's revelation to us, the Word of God, Scripture.

**Dr. Danny Akin**

We address the question of how the Spirit of God, or how God himself operates with human authors in producing the Scriptures, I think we have to be honest that there is a sense in which there's a mystery to it. We don't have all the answers that we would like to have in terms of that dynamic. But my good friend David Dockery, who is a president of a wonderful seminary up in Chicago, he likes to use the word "concurative." And I think it's a good word. It has the idea, then, of the Spirit of God coming together with human authors so that the Spirit of God is fully active in the production of Scripture, and the human authors are also fully active in the production of Scripture. And they come together so that, though there are two authors, the result is one book... Or to put it in percentages, how much of the Bible is a divine book? Well, 100%. And how much of the Bible is a human book? Well, 100%. And yet somehow, they come together to produce a 100% book that is both fully divine and fully human.

**Dr. Glenn R. Kreider**

The Spirit's work is always mysterious. Understanding how the Spirit functions in accomplishing what the Spirit does is always mysterious. Jesus describes in John 3 to

Nicodemus that you don't know what the Spirit is doing; it's like the wind, you can see its effects, but you don't know what's going on when it happens. I think we have a similar question when we talk about the Spirit's work in the writing of Scriptures. I think it's likely that the biblical writers at times knew that they were recording God's word. When God speaks and says, "Write this down," it's a pretty good indication it's coming from God. But there are other times that they wrote their words and that the language they use sounds an awful lot like them; it has the marks of the human author. But as my teacher put it, Dr. Ryrie, says that God superintended the process so that what the human authors wrote is what God intended, that somehow, mysteriously, God superintended that process, in a similar way that the Spirit of God came upon Mary so that the child to be born was the Son of God. That's as much as we know about how that process works. In a very similar way, we don't know for sure how the process works, but this is what we know: that we confess that the Scripture is God's word to us, that every word of it is God's word to us, and that it comes to us not only by means of the Spirit of God in the writing, but it comes to us by means of the Spirit of God in the interpretation, that the Spirit of God who gave us the Scripture is the Spirit, the same Spirit, who helps us to understand, who interprets it, that God who spoke continues to speak through his Word.

### **Question 7:**

#### **What's the difference between illumination and inspiration?**

##### **Dr. Mike Fabarez**

Inspiration describes the oversight of God so that the authors wrote down precisely what God intended, as compared to illumination. The doctrine of illumination of the Holy Spirit is the aid that the Spirit of God gives those who read the text of Scripture. According to 1 Corinthians 2, the natural man cannot receive or understand the things of God, certainly not to the point of comprehending them as God intended. So, the doctrine of illumination is the Holy Spirit's work to open up the minds and eyes of those who read the text, to be able to comprehend exactly what God intended it to mean.

##### **Dr. Simon Vibert**

There are two words used in Scripture related to the role of the Holy Spirit. One is illumination and the other is inspiration. Inspiration refers to the fact that the Holy Spirit oversaw the writing of Scripture, moving human beings to write down divinely inspired words. Illumination is what we pray for when we read those words, that God would make them live, that we would appreciate them, that we'd grasp them, that we'd want to obey them. So, inspiration is God's initial work of making sure that the Bible got written for our benefit, and the Holy Spirit continues to illuminate those who read those very words so that they may grasp them better and live by them.

##### **Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail, translation**

The Holy Spirit has two roles that we can compare. There is the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration, through which he works in the mind of a writer, either a prophet in the Old Testament or an apostle of the New Testament, to send his word to his audience. This is inspiration. But illumination is different. It means that the Holy Spirit illuminates the believer's mind while he's listening to the Word of God. He may also illuminate the unbeliever's mind who listens to the Word of God and opens his heart to let the meaning of the Word, the meaning of the inspiration, go deeply inside of him. So, illumination is a continuous process that happens with millions of people, while inspiration was a very specific work that happened with the apostles and prophets who were used by God to write the Scriptures. We will not receive inspiration from God, but we all pray that our minds might be illuminated by the work of the Holy Spirit to understand the written word of God to us.

### Question 8:

#### How do illumination and inward leading from the Holy Spirit help us interpret God's revelation to us?

##### Dr. Simon Vibert

Illumination and inward leading of the Holy Spirit help us interpret God's revelation to us. There are many places in Scripture that we could turn to, to see this demonstrated. Perhaps, most obviously is in 1 Corinthians 2 where we read this:

**The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of ... man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).**

And it's that same Holy Spirit who inspired the written word of God who actually continues to enable us to grasp God's truth through inward illumination and inward promptings. And the work of the Spirit is to make God's written word real, alive and applicable to our own lives, to help us to live in a way that glorifies God today.

##### Dr. Gregg R. Allison

One of the wonderful works of the Holy Spirit in our lives as Christians is to illumine Scripture or provide resources for us to be able to interpret and apply the Bible accurately and properly. In 1 Corinthians 2:14-16, Paul talks about a natural person and a spiritual person. In the context, Paul's talking about who can receive and understand the revelation of God. The *natural* person, Paul says, doesn't understand God's revelation. Indeed, the natural person can't understand the things of God because the Spirit is needed to understand this divine revelation. Paul then talks about the *spiritual* person or the person who is illumined and guided by the Holy Spirit. This spiritual person, the person illumined by the Holy Spirit, can indeed understand and embrace all that God has revealed. So, as we study the Bible, God's revelation to

us, we should begin that study — our reading of Scripture, our meditation on Scripture — by praying, asking for the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds and our hearts so that, as we read Scripture, we would rightly understand it and that the Spirit would open our heart so that what we understand, we're ready and willing to obey, to submit to, to trust. So, the Spirit's wonderful work is to help us understand the Word of God, understand it's meaning, and be ready to apply it as we understand it. This is the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

### Question 9:

#### Why does the Gospel of John often refer to Jesus' miracles as "signs"?

##### **Dr. Dan Lacich**

In the Gospel of John, he oftentimes speaks of the miracles that Jesus performs as being "signs." We need to ask ourselves the question, signs of what? And in that culture, they understood that signs of the supernatural, of the miraculous, was a sign of a spiritual reality, and John wants us to see that those signs are pointing to Jesus as being, in fact, God in the flesh, God among us, that his supernatural power comes because he is, in fact, the incarnate Christ. And that was a big debate for folks. At one point, the Pharisees try to figure out how can we deal with these signs that Jesus is performing yet not acknowledge that he brings that power from God because they didn't like that side of it. So, they tried to interpret his power as being actually coming from Satan. Well, Jesus dealt with that very clearly, that Satan's not going to fight against Satan, so Jesus himself was saying, if you don't believe my words, believe the signs, believe the things that I have done to demonstrate that I actually am who I claim to be: I am God come in the flesh; God is among you right now.

##### **Dr. Craig S. Keener**

What we call miracles today, the Gospels often refer to as "signs," because a sign points to something. So, yeah, the signs demonstrate God's compassion, but there are also signs as a foretaste of the kingdom. In the Gospel of John in particular, the signs point to Jesus' identity. The entire Gospel of John is framed — John 1:1 and then the end of the prologue, verse 18, and then in 20:28 — the bulk of the Gospel is framed with Jesus' deity. And so, the signs show something about who Jesus is as well as what he does.

##### **Dr. Gregg R. Allison**

The Gospel of John rehearses seven miracles of Jesus Christ and calls them "signs." Why *these* seven miracles and why call them signs? John is building his case for the deity of Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Word who became incarnate, the Savior of the world, and so that we, as we read the Gospel of John, might believe in him, and have eternal life. And so, John selects seven miracles, for example, the changing of water into wine at Cana, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the feeding of the five thousand. He chooses seven of these miracles. He calls

them “signs” because they point beyond themselves to the identity of Jesus. He is no other than the Son of God, fully God, the God who has become incarnate, and who is the Savior of the world. If we trust in him, we will have eternal life. John is building the case through these seven miracles, these seven signs, so that we might trust Christ and know him eternally.

### **Question 10:** **What is common grace?**

#### **Rev. Canon Alfred Sabahene, Ph.D.**

Common grace is God’s loving and favorable attitude to human beings. In the Psalms we read, for example, “Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.” Common grace testifies a good will of God towards all humanity, showing itself in the manifold gifts and blessings. Now, to understand common grace, one has to remember that while God’s universal goodness is to be celebrated, yet the truth remains that our God is the God of justice as well. It is this God who sets the harmony between his universal goodness and, of course, his justice.

#### **Dr. John McKinley**

Theologians have two terms for grace to distinguish the different works of God. One is common grace, and the other is saving grace. And the importance of identifying common grace is something that God does generally that pretty much is available to everybody in some ways or other. Like when the rain comes down, it’s for people that belong to God and people that don’t, and so he gives rain to the just and the unjust. Common grace is, maybe, the setting for preserving and blessing people and inclining them to seek for God, but it doesn’t save anybody; it’s for them to look. And then saving grace is where God is reaching to people and converting their heart. Saving grace is done by the Spirit, and I think we should assume that common grace is also done by the Spirit, because he is the one that is working closest in in creation, and he is the one that touches our hearts in saving grace. So, it’s a preparatory work to do good to creation that oftentimes leads to saving grace where the Holy Spirit works on us, and it can include experiencing love, being able to enjoy art and beauty and have satisfying things in life, eating food, and these are all gifts from God and provided by the Holy Spirit.

#### **Dr. Lin Yuan I, translation**

When our ancestor Adam sinned, man was separated from God, and from then on our understanding of God has gradually slipped away. But because God still loves us, we still receive “common grace.” For example, we are all created by God. Every one of us, whether we believe in him or not, is made in his image. So it’s very natural for man to retain a certain level of sensitivity towards nature and God... This is [an aspect] of common grace. Through this common grace, a person can almost feel as if God is there, but not completely get to know him. [It’s only] when a person

encounters special grace that he can return to [truly] knowing God. Through common grace, we can somewhat feel things such as God's existence or God's love. This in turn helps us to share God's love with others. For example, we can all have compassion; we'll help the poor; we'll feel sorry for those who are suffering. These are all God's gifts to our lives. But what's more important about these gifts is [for us] to have God's heart for mankind and to bring people back into his presence. That, in fact, is the work of special revelation and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

### **Question 11:**

#### **Why do fallen, unsaved human beings still exhibit truthfulness, goodness and beauty?**

##### **Dr. David Correa, D.Min., translation**

One of the things that sometimes leaves Christians perplexed is how non-Christians can display kindness and beauty and speak truth. Above all, some traditions that believe in the "total depravity" of man, find it difficult to believe that unbelievers can act in love and in truth. But that is what we observe. The fact is non-believers behave in those ways. How can this be the case? Well, we know that God created man in his image, and the fall into sin didn't eliminate the image of God. In the man, of course, the image of God was corrupted, but not totally lost. Somehow, even though [they are] corrupt, human beings still reflect their Creator. On the one hand, this is what I think explains why unbelievers can act in these ways. It's the common grace of God that operates over *all* humans, and permits unbelievers to act in a loving way, to tell the truth, etc. We speak of common grace, because we realize that Scripture teaches that this grace of God is a common operation of God in human beings. For example, it restrains the sin of fallen human beings. This means that, thanks to that, the world can still be a habitable place where there is decency, where there is order. Human beings, because of the operation of this grace, do not unleash all their wickedness. On the other hand, because of the common grace of God, we see that human beings are capable of producing good things to bless the community. In other words, by the common operation of the Holy Spirit, we see unbelievers producing artifacts, creating culture and science and art, which still continue to reflect — albeit in a limited way — but still continue to reflect the truth of God. That's why we can see that unbelievers are capable of loving and serving their fellow man.

##### **Dr. John McKinley**

We wonder why people who are rebels, who are set on themselves, sinners, are still able to do good things. They exhibit beauty. They seek truth. They can do a lot of good as it appears. How can they do this if they're severing themselves from God? And we can explain it some by saying that nobody does good apart from God, and so God is still at work in them, it's just it's not acknowledged; it's not recognized. And we can also say that there is a kind of common grace that is at work, that they are being supported and sustained — probably the work of the Holy Spirit — to desire

and do these things. But they're doing it... It's not true good because they're doing it, in a sense, out of bounds or in resistance to God, so it's somewhat superficial. They're doing it in spite of themselves, and it's not something that God regards as something to their credit.

**Dr. Glenn R. Kreider**

The fundamental reason why unsaved, fallen human beings still demonstrate goodness and beauty is because they are created in the image of God, that every human being without exception is created in God's image and likeness, which I take is that every human being reveals God, represents him in the world, and functions as his ruler in the world — representation, revelation and rule. But a second reason, and John Calvin points this out when he tells us that we should respect the truth wherever it's found because the truth always comes from the Spirit of God. And if we reject truth, and by implication, if we would reject goodness and beauty, we would be rejecting the work of the Spirit, even from nonbelievers. In his commentary on the pastoral epistles, Calvin also uses language that sounds an awful lot like, "All truth is God's truth," where he says that truth, wherever it's found, comes from the Spirit of God, and that goodness, beauty, anything that is good, is a result of God's creation of us and the work of the Spirit in this world. The good news is, in a world that is fallen and in a world where things are not the way they're supposed to be, the Spirit of God is still present and active and his activity in the world is demonstrated, I think, in the manifestations of the goodness that could only have come from God.

**Question 12:**

**What are some ways that the Holy Spirit restrains evil and promotes goodness in humanity at large?**

**Dr. John McKinley**

We look at God's work in creation and the role of the Holy Spirit to be involved in daily life, and we wonder, how does he restrain evil and promote good? Because we have to assume that good things are done by God, and the person doing it would be the Holy Spirit, and many evils that could take place don't by the action of God. So, we can guess from examples that are given in the Bible to things that are happening in life, where the Holy Spirit prevents the apostles from going into an area. And that wasn't an evil thing, but it is something where he is forbidding a particular action. So then, you connect that with, Joseph's brothers wanted to murder him, but then they're diverted from doing that. Who did that? How did that happen? Or the multiple times that they sought to kill Jesus, but somehow, he escaped. And we don't have to look into human power to do that. We can see that the Holy Spirit is influencing, he is speaking to people's hearts, he is stirring them, provoking them; various unrecognized ways of working where God's purposes are still moving forward. So, broadly speaking, evils that otherwise would happen but don't fit God's purposes are going to be prevented, and evils that still may serve God's purposes, like the cross,

he's going to let them go. And then we know from Ephesians 2:10 that all the good things that we do have been prepared beforehand that we would walk in them. So, we can say that all the good things that Christians are doing are motivated by the Spirit and certainly for the nonbeliever as well. So, he is hidden and constantly at work to do all these good things.

**Dr. P. J. Buys**

In God's common grace he restrains the total outbreak of evil and total destruction of this whole earth, and he stirs up a sense of love and a sense of justice and compassion in the hearts of people, even if they are not specifically his children, and the reason why he does that is he does it for the sake of his own people, for his church, that they can continue to exist and serve him in this world.

**Question 13:**

**Why does the Holy Spirit nurture and provide for the lives of sinners who will never come to faith?**

**Dr. John McKinley**

When the Bible presents things as so black and white, that God knows everything that's going on with people and he knows who is going to believe and who is not, and he is closely involved, we wonder why he also works for people ... who he knows are never going to believe and, in fact, never do. Why does he nurture their life? Why does the Holy Spirit work and do good things for these people? And we can guess at a couple of reasons why. One reason is that it's a manifestation of God's love. He gives rain to the just and the unjust, and even though they are rebellious, even though they do things that go against God and great evil, he can still say, "But I showed you love. I provided salvation for you, I gave you good things throughout your life," and that is adding further to their judgment and their lack of any excuse for the wrong things that they have done. It also seems, like the parable of the wheat and the weeds, that God has things to do through these people for purposes. So, they might have children that are born; maybe the parents aren't believers, but God has people he wants to bring into existence that are believers, and their parents would be. So, sustaining creation where there are going to be a great many weeds in the field for the sake of the wheat, he tells, in the parable, he tells the angels "Don't pull it out, you might pull out the wheat while pulling the weeds, so let them both grow up together." So, I think God is exercising tolerance and patience towards people that he knows are going to hate him and do great evil, because, in spite of them, he's going to do a lot of great good in the creation and through particular lives. We can't trace it all out to see in every case why allowing this person to exist, even though they were going to murder or kidnap or rape somebody, but we can trust that God is good and that he is using his power to bring about an ultimate good plan, and it has some dark spots in it, but the overall thing can be good. And so, our option is then to trust God and see that in the end, it's going to be worked out, and in the end, there's going to be no evil, that permission of

sin is temporary.

**Dr. Glenn R. Kreider**

The Spirit of God is present and active in God's world. God has created human beings in his image and likeness, which gives them dignity. And God is the source of life, and life is good, and for reasons which are really beyond our ability to know and completely understand, that God is gracious to believers and to nonbelievers, to the elect, to the non-elect, and to the elect who are not yet the elect, and that he mediates goodness and grace and life to them. I am committed to the proposition that life is good and death is bad, and one of God's great gifts, even to nonbelievers, is to give them life and the experience of goodness in the world that God has created.

**Question 14:**

**How should the fact that God gives common grace to unbelievers as well as believers impact the way we evaluate our surrounding culture?**

**Dr. David Correa, D.Min., translation**

The fact that God gives common grace to unbelievers should impact the way in which believers view the culture. Traditionally, evangelical Christians have had trouble relating to the culture around them... We see some believers simply trying to be isolated from the culture around them. They don't want to have any contact with the culture because they understand Jesus' command to separate themselves from the world to mean that Christians should separate themselves from the *culture*. When Jesus said, "You are not of the world but are in the world," they believe that Jesus is calling us to a physical separation from the culture around us, not to participate in society, and to just stay within our Christian circle. On to the other extreme, they have gone to the extreme of assimilating the culture in a way that, while trying to be relevant to their culture, they end up just acculturating themselves so much so that there is no difference between the church and the culture around them. Believers must understand that Jesus never commanded us to separate ourselves from the culture. He commanded us to separate ourselves from the *world*. The "world" must be understood as the bad part of the culture without the influence of common grace and the special grace of God.

But when it comes to human culture, we can see that there are good elements and bad elements. The good elements in the culture are precisely because of the common grace of God. By his common grace, God gives blessings to all equally. He makes his sun rise on the good and the bad. By his common grace, God restrains the sin of human beings. And also by his common grace, God even allows nonbelievers to create art and science and develop technology that can be used for the benefit of society. We see in the Scriptures that, for example, in the Old Testament when David was to build the temple, he was willing to use the unmatched ability of some cabinetmakers or woodcarvers that came from pagan lands, like the region of Tyre

and Sidon. There was no one like them, it says in Scripture, when it came to woodworking... How are we going to allow pagans to work in the temple of the Lord? But we see that Scripture helps us understand that we must recognize that, by his grace, God allows us to find truth among the heathens. We can find beautiful things that can serve and be used by Christians themselves

**Dr. Bruce Little**

Some people have talked about John Calvin in his view when he said that we should accept truth wherever it is found. That led to a more general way of saying it, that “All truth is God’s truth”... So, what did he mean by that? Well, if you read his commentary on Titus, also his *Institutes*, in one place in his *Institutes* he says that God the Creator has, in a way, given common grace. And he said, the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, and therefore, even though man is fallen, because of common grace, even the fallen man could know truth about the universe. And he said, to despise that truth would be actually offensive to the Spirit of God, which I would agree with. I think there is a great truth in that, that even though man is fallen, he is not — as [Francis] Schaeffer would say — he’s not “a zero”; he can understand things about our world. Scientists have done marvelous things. Unsaved scientists, the medical profession, all the way down the line, we just see people who have not trusted in Christ, and yet, because the world is one way and not another, and because we all live in the same world, why some of these people stumble upon — maybe — they stumble upon truth, and if it comports with the text, the Bible, then we should not despise it. We could even learn something from it... Here’s the concern that I have: it’s that, when we take that truth, that we don’t drag some of the naturalistic thinking along with it. When a man has a toolbox, and he picks out one tool, well, seldom do we just get one tool in this work. We usually get the whole toolbox. So, unless we’re very discerning, when we say, yes, that’s a truth, we must always make sure that it’s a truth that we can substantiate from the text and that we don’t let any of the worldview in which that truth was revealed come along with it, because that, I think, would be kind of dangerous. But as a comment as Calvin made that “All truth is God’s truth,” I think we have to say that is right because Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” I don’t know where else truth would reside if it doesn’t reside in God. And if this is his creation, then I would expect no matter who looks at it, if they get it right, they’ve got truth, and we should not despise it.

## Contributors

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