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TALK#01
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What do we mean when we speak of the “means of grace”? And how did our fathers view them? As we will see, the answers to our question revolve around how the puritans in general, and specifically our Particular Baptist fathers, viewed the church.

Let’s begin with this question: Did our Puritan fathers think that the church is important? Listen to these words in Westminster Conf 25:2 “The visible Church, ... is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.” In the greatest of their Confessions, in the Chapter “Of the Church,” they make this audacious statement. Ordinarily, there is no possibility of salvation outside of the visible church!

While our Confession does not employ these terms, it teaches a similar doctrine. In Chapter 26 we read these words:

4. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, in whom by the appointment of the Father, all power for the calling, institution, order, or Government of the Church, is invested in a supream & soveraign manner

5. In the execution of this power wherewith he is so intrusted, the Lord Jesus calleth out of the World unto himself, **through the Ministry of his word, by his Spirit**, those that are given unto him by his Father; that they may walk before him in all the ways of obedience, which he prescribeth to them in his Word. Those thus called he commandeth to walk together in particular societies, or Churches, for their mutual edification; and the due performance of that publick worship, which he requireth of them in the World.

Where does Jesus Christ exercise his power? Where are men ordinarily called to faith? In the place where the ministry of the Word, blessed by the Holy Spirit, is commonly found, where public worship is performed, where His people are edified. This is the local church. And as we shall see, the language of chapter 26 builds upon the doctrine of the earlier chapters.

Why is the church so important in Puritanism? The puritans were reformed believers who understood that the church is the intersection between heaven and earth—the place where God makes himself known in saving grace. While the heavens declare the glory of God, and all the world is the theater of his glory, it is in the church where he most fully displays his love and mercy. Consider Ephesians 2:19-22, “19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” The church is where God dwells by His Spirit.

Here’s an important question: how does God’s grace reach sinners? This is a query that seldom is asked. Have you ever thought about it? Are there invisible bubbles of grace scattered around the world, so that if you happen to walk through one, you receive its benefits? The idea that grace is a physical commodity is ridiculous. But how does grace come to us?

Is the gift of grace immediate—God simply sovereignly sends grace into the heart of a sinner? This idea would seem to indicate that God saves sinners apart from the Word. Some hyper-Calvinists suggest that this is the case—that God simply injects grace into a person’s life—so that there may be many elect around the world, even in places with no gospel witness, by God’s direct and

immediate act. If this were the case, there is no need for missions and evangelism.

Or is grace mediate? Does God appoint certain means that he will use to bring his elect to faith? I suspect that we all would agree that grace is dispensed mediately—through some method. But what is that method? Puritan theologians gave careful thought to this question and provide us with a cogent theological answer. Our task today is to think through that answer, and in doing so, we will understand why the doctrine of the means of grace is so important.

Get ready, because this is not the individualistic doctrine of revivalism or even modern evangelicalism. It's the good old Reformed doctrine.

Let's begin with Q63 of the Westminster Larger Catechism. It explains WCF 25:2

WLC Q. 63. What are the special privileges of the visible church?

A. The visible church hath the privilege of being under God's special care and government; of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies; and of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation, and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in the ministry of the gospel, testifying, that whosoever believes in him shall be saved, and excluding none that will come unto him.

The idea is that the visible church enjoys special privileges not extended to any other gatherings in this life.

Listen to 2 quotations from the greatest Puritan theologian, John Owen. These will set the field for us:

Owen: 3:592-93: Such is the nature of the unalterable decree of God in this matter, that no person living can ever attain the end of glory and happiness without the means of grace and holiness; the same eternal purpose respecteth both.

7:141: The rule of his [God's] continuance with any people or church, as to the outward dispensation of his providence and the means of grace, is that expressed 2 Chronicles 15:2, 'The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.' He judicially forsakes them by whom he is willfully forsaken.

Owen sets these ideas into the realm of the doctrine of God. In the first, God's decree is unalterable, and He has established certain means by which he grants grace and holiness. In the second, the continued presence of God with any group of people depends upon their observing these means—because that's where God promises to bless them. We are introduced to a centrally important doctrine—the means of grace.

A. To what does the phrase "means of grace" refer?

Unless we think carefully, we will not understand exactly what this phrase intends. Frequently, we use it generally to describe any good and useful activity in the church or the Christian life. There is no denying that there are many good and useful activities in the Church and the Christian life, and we ought to do them and encourage others to do so. But a 'good and useful activity' is not necessarily a 'means of grace.' We must not equate them. Our Puritan fathers

considered very carefully the question of definition, and have given us helpful criteria by which we may distinguish between things that are good and useful, and things that should be specifically called ‘means of grace’. Let me try to help you think through this. If you examine the Reformed Confessions, including our own Second London Confession, you will find some technical language used to define and identify the means of grace. In Reformed churches, they are simple, and they are few.

Two definitions:

Muller *Dictionary* 187: The method “. . . by which the grace of God is active in the church . . . instrumental both in the inception of salvation and in the continuance of the work of grace.”

Hodge *Systematic Theology* 3:466 “The phrase is intended to indicate those institutions which God has ordained to be the ordinary channels of grace, *i.e.*, of the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit, to the souls of men.”

Both definitions highlight God’s action in salvation. The doctrine of the means of grace seeks to answer the question “how does a sovereign God bring salvation to sinners?”

What makes something a means of grace? In the Confessions, two criteria are used to mark them out. If you were taking an exam after this message, I would guarantee that these two things would be on that exam!

1. Divine institution
2. Divine promise of efficacy/blessing attached

The first is divine institution, though we might sharpen this to say dominical institution. ‘Divine institution’ points us to a divine origination and command, and addresses the problem of man-centeredness identified by the reformers. Man-made religious acts have no part in God’s distribution of grace. I sharpen the phrase because there are many things that are of divine institution that are not, now under the New Covenant, ‘means of grace.’ For example, circumcision. Was it divinely instituted? Of course! But the requirement of circumcision was limited to a particular covenant, and it is now gone. If we say ‘dominical institution’ we clearly indicate that these things belong to the New Covenant and come to us through the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. You will notice, for example, that our Confession makes this point very carefully in 28:1 which says, “Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, to be continued in His church to the end of the world.” This is significant language, intended to teach us that there is something exceptionally important about these things. In order for something to be a ‘means of grace’, it must have dominical institution—a command from the Lord Jesus.

The second criteria, which helps to define further the ‘means of grace’ is that there must be attached a promise of divine blessing. By this, our fathers were thinking covenantally, recognizing that God reveals himself by way of covenant, and the acts are related to His covenant. The Lord very explicitly promises that he will bless these acts, and we thus are able to trust his promise and rely on him to be faithful to the commitments he makes. This addresses the matter of semi-pelagianism. These are the acts of God, and the promise is made that Christ will be present in them.

We have two principles which serve as criteria for determining the identity of the means of grace. They are based upon a fundamentally important and basic assumption, and this needs to be emphasized: Christ is truly a present and active Lord. Consider texts such as these:

Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.^{1”}

Acts 2:22-24 and 33-36 Men of Israel, listen to these words:

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—

23 this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.

24 “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. ² This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

33 “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

34 “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:

“THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,

“SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,

35 UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.”[’]

36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”³

Eph 1:15-23 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰ which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

²² And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. ⁴

These truths were crucial in the thinking of the reformers and puritans. This was a principal matter. Christianity is based on the fact that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, that he lived a life of holy obedience to God’s law, that he offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross and propitiated God, that he died, was buried and rose from the dead on the first day of the week. But the essence of our faith doesn’t stop there. Our fathers believed, and we must also, that Christ ascended into heaven and now sits at God’s right hand, reigning with all the power in the universe. He is not an absent Lord, but a very real and present Lord who takes direct interest in his church on earth. He alone extends

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Mt 28:18–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Ac 2:22–24). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

³ *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Ac 2:32–36). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Eph 1:15–23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the kingdom, he alone causes believers to grow like himself, he alone works in their lives. The gospel is not just about historical events—though it certainly is—but it is also about a presently active Lord Jesus Christ. From their perspective, he was not merely crowned as king of heaven, watching to see what would happen with his church. To the contrary, he was a very real and present Lord with a direct interest in the expansion of his kingdom. They believed that Christ was at hand, walking among the candlesticks and personally active among his people. And because of this foundational belief, they asked the question, what has *he* appointed as the method by which *he* accomplishes his will? Is it simply reactive to events that take place on earth, or is it proactive, ensuring that all of the elect will, at the proper time, be brought to faith and grow in Christ?

2. Defining the Means of Grace

Let's try to define this phrase more carefully.

A. *Grace*

Grace must be understood specifically and narrowly as the mediatorial benefits purchased for the elect by Jesus Christ. God's unmerited favor extended to sinners. It originates in God, and comes only from him. Grace provides every aspect of salvation to humans—it is completely apart from human works of any kind. John 1:14&16: “**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**” Grace is the purchased fruit of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not a physical commodity, but a divine gift. Read through the NT and notice how often the phrase “gift of grace” appears in one form or another. Grace is to the soul what water is to the soil. Without it, we are only parched, barren, uninhabitable deserts. But grace brings life to our souls. Grace is a gift from God.

1. *Grace* may be used *generally* to speak of all the blessings purchased by our mediator Jesus Christ. In this sense, *grace* is a category. It includes everything we need for life and godliness.
2. *Grace* may also be used to describe the specific gifts within the category. For example, *faith*, *hope*, and *love* are each graces individually. The Lord gives us faith to believe, hope to endure, and love for God and our neighbor. None of these blessings are natural or native to us. They are *graces*.

B. *Means*

The other term, ‘*means*,’ is an English rendering of the Latin word ‘*media*’ and it simply indicates a method of communicating or imparting something. We speak of the ‘news media’ that in theory are the instruments to inform us of events that take place in the world around us. The phrase ‘means of grace’ simply speaks of the instruments or methods God determines to employ to bring grace, both generally and specifically, to his elect. God sovereignly grants grace to us as sinners. Our question is “By what methods does he make this grant?”

3. A Theology of the means of grace

We could begin w/the Puritan and Reformed doctrine of Scripture as a perfect and complete revelation of the will of God, and, then with their doctrine of God as sovereign creator, sustainer and governor of all things. But let's move more quickly to the doctrine of the decree of God.

2 LCF Chapter 3 Of God's Decree

1. God hath decreed in Himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever come to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of

second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree.

God has decreed all things. Including the events of your conversion? Of course.

6. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so He hath, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the **means** thereunto; wherefore they who are elect, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ, by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation; neither are any other redeemed by Christ, or effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

God has appointed the *means* of your conversion. This is a subset of the doctrine of the decree. Whatever the *means* are, they are decreed. The context does point us forward: effectual calling & the golden chain

The next step in building this doctrine is to notice how God brings His decrees into reality in the world:

Baptist Catechism

Q. 11. *What are the decrees of God?*

A. The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, by which for his own glory, he has foreordained whatever comes to pass.

Q. 12. *How does God execute his decrees?*

A. God executes his decrees in the works of creation and providence.

Creation/providence. Creation assures us that these things are part of the order made by God—not simply theoretical concepts; providence tells us how God brings them to pass in the created realm. He is not far away, but active. Think about our doctrine of providence:

2LCF Chapter 5 Of Divine Providence

1. God the good creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all His creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for which they were created, according unto His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will; to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.

2. Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without His providence; yet by the same providence He ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

3. God, in His ordinary providence maketh use of **means**, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at His pleasure.

Here is the doctrine. God in His governance of the world, employs *means* to accomplish His decreed will. There are means of nature, and there are means of grace, and, there are miracles. God ordinarily works according to the laws he has established in creation: you reap what you sow etc. God is free to suspend the use of means—without, above and against—at his pleasure. This is the theological justification for miracles. God is God, and is free to supersede the normal laws he himself

has established—in defiance of gravity and bouyancy, and axehead floats. Against the law of supply and proportion, 5 loaves and 2 fish feed a multitude. God is free to do this. But these are miracles. Ordinarily, he uses means—methods—procedures.

We may here notice the linguistic connections between the terms, ordinary and ordained. These are not accidental linguistic connections. *Ordinary* and its derivatives flow from the word *ordained*, especially when it appears in theological discourse. OED: Ordinary = “Conformable to order or rule; regular.” For example, in his book *Gold Refin’d* (page 88) Benjamin Keach says about baptism, “The Lord Jesus hath plainly excluded Infants in his Commission from this Administration, according to **ordinary Rule**; for in that he commands them to Baptize Disciples, upon preaching first to them, it follows, that none but such who are so taught, and so by teaching made Disciples, are by virtue of the Commission, to be baptized; ... and there is no other way, according to **ordinary Rule**, of being made Disciples but by that means.” In his work *Antipaedobaptism*, John Tombes uses the phrase “**ordinary rule**” 18 times. For example (second part page 82): “The **ordinary rule** for baptizing is Christs institution, John the Baptist’s, and the Apostles’ appointment and practice.” Even the term **rule** is important [see OED entry above]. It is closely related to *regular*, *regulate*, *regulation*. The old American Particular Baptists were called *Regular* Baptists because of their adherence to the rule. There is a close relationship between *ordinary* and *rule*. In these cases, they both speak of

divine command. Ordinary providence is how God expresses his rule, and to do so he uses means. What are they?

Chapter 14 Of Saving Faith

1. The **grace** of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word; by which also, and by the administration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, prayer, and other **means** appointed of God, it is increased and strengthened.

How does the *grace* of faith come? *Ordinarily* it is the result of preaching—the ministry of the Word, and it grows and is strengthened by baptism, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, and other means appointed by God. Listen to the Baptist Catechism, a 1693 document intended by the PB’s to help families teach and learn doctrine:

Baptist Catechism

Q. 94. *What are the outward **means**, by which Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?*

A. The outward and **ordinary means**, by which Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption, are his **ordinances**, especially the Word of God, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer; all which **means** are made effectual to the elect for salvation. *Notice the linguistic connection: ordinary/ordinances. It’s an important part of the Baptist polemic.* The ministry of the Word, baptism, Lord’s Supper, prayer. Just like 2LCF 14:1.

This question is followed by several to expound the specifics of the doctrine:

Q. 95 *How is the Word made effectual to salvation?*

A. The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual **means** of convincing and converting sinners; and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

Reading” here is the public reading of Scripture. Nehemiah 8:8 is the first proof text: “they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.” The other terms are also results of the ministry of the Word.

Preaching the Word is a special and unique means of grace, for it is the only *converting* ordinance among them. Baptism, LS and prayer do not convert anyone. To think otherwise is to fall into the sacerdotalist trap. Observing them may be useful in bringing someone to conversion—watching a baptism, or observing as Christians commune in the supper and ‘proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’ or seeing growth in believers in result of their prayer “increase our faith” may all be used of God for good in the lives of unbelievers, but they will never convert anyone. Only the faithfully preached Word, attended by the Spirit, is a converting means of grace. Water doesn’t save; bread and wine don’t impart faith to unbelievers, even prayer without faith is useless. The Word alone gives life.

Q. 96. *How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?*

[Notice the combination “read and heard.”]

A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer, receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

Q. 97. *How do baptism and the Lord’s Supper become effectual **means** of salvation?*

A. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper become effectual **means** of salvation, not for any virtue in them, or in him that does administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of the Spirit in those that by faith receive them.

Effectual!!! Notice that this is for believers—“those that by faith receive them.” Dead sinners have no faith. Baptism and LS are for believers only.

Q. 106. *What is prayer?*

A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, believing, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

This doctrine is repeated in chapter 22. The means of grace are part of worship.

2 LCF Chapter 22 Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day

5. The reading of the Scriptures, preaching, and hearing the Word of God, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; as also the administration of baptism, and the Lord’s supper, are all parts of religious worship of God, to be performed in obedience to Him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear; moreover, solemn humiliation, with fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, ought to be used in an holy and religious manner.

Did you notice that in 14:1 there are “other means appointed of God?” Here they are—on special occasions, such as ordinations (26:9)—days of fasting and/or thanksgiving should be observed. In these times, we seek God’s face for gracious blessings and worship Him for His great mercy.

2LCF 29:1 Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, **ordained by Jesus Christ**, to be *unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with Him, in His death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into Him;(1) of remission of sins;(2) and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.*

Here, baptism is described in terms of wonderful blessing! The Lord's Supper is the same:

2LCF 30:1 The supper of the **Lord Jesus was instituted by Him** the same night wherein He was betrayed, to be observed in His churches, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and shewing forth the sacrifice of Himself in His death,(1) *confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in Him, their further engagement in, and to all duties which they owe to Him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other.*

These are wonderful words! Do you see how important the doctrine of the means of grace is in our Confession? Grace is not immediately given to us, like being zapped by heavenly lightning. Rather, it is granted to us as we observe the appointed activities—when we sit under the Word in worship; when we are baptized and observe the Supper, and when the church prays for more grace.

4. Some useful comments on the means of grace

William Whitaker, one of the ministers ejected in 1662:
Puritan Sermons 1:515: Of all good things, account them the best which may promote your endeavours after that

good which is the highest; as ordinances, the means of grace, which at how high a rate they are valued by David, may appear from his pathetic and most affectionate desires of waiting upon God in them. (Psalm xxvii. 4 ; xlii. 1, 2; lxiii. 1, 2.) [Ps 27:4 One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.”]

Hanserd Knollys: *The Parable of the Kingdom of Heaven Expounded:* 50-51:

Query 1: How may Professors attain unto the power of Godliness and so become wise Virgins.

Sol. 1. Professors must come to Christ in the Ordinances of God, 1 Cor. 1.18, 24.... The plain and powerful preaching of the Gospel is the ordinary means whereby God draws sinners with Cords of Love to Christ, and makes the Ministry of the word powerful and effectual to call, convert, sanctify and save sinners, Rom. 1.16,17; Rom. 10.14,17.

Knollys: *Parable* 112-13: It is the duty of every person, that sees their need and want of Christ his Holy Spirit, and sanctifying grace, to attend upon the ministry of the Gospel and administrations of the holy ordinances of God, and to accept and receive Christ and grace, oil offered without money or price.

Many sinners are so blinded, 2 Cor. 4. 3, 4, that they see no form nor comeliness in Christ; and when they do see some beauty and excellency in him, yet they are apt to refuse and reject him, until they be thoroughly convinced of their want and need of him, his Spirit and grace, and that there is not salvation in any other, Acts 4. 12. And then they begin to desire and say, Oh! that I had Christ; Oh! that I had

grace; Oh! that I could believe. Now it is their duty to attend diligently and conscionably upon the ministry of the gospel and means of grace; for faith comes by hearing the word preached, Rom. 10. 17. Acts 14. 1. Isa. 55. 3. *Incline your ear, come unto me, hear and your souls shall live, And I will make an everlasting covenant with you.*

Thomas Goodwin: 3:331: Go on to use all the means of grace more diligently, more constantly, though thou findest a long while no good by them. Omit no ordinance God hath appointed for thy comfort and recovery. As in a long sickness, you still use means though many have failed; as the woman who had the bloody issue spent all upon physicians, in the use of means for her recovery. That trouble of mind doth only hurt you that drives you from the means. Therefore the devil endeavours nothing more than to keep such souls from the word, from good company, from the sacraments, from prayer, by objecting their unprofitableness unto them, and that all is in vain, and that you do but increase your condemnation. But, first, if thou learnest no other lesson in the use of the means but that thou art of thyself most unprofitable, and that unless God teacheth thee to profit no good is done, and so learnest to depend upon God in the ordinance; this is a great degree of profiting.

Goodwin 6:36-37: The whole edification of every saint, by the means of grace, which are the ordinances and other means whatsoever, all flow from the benign influences of this Spirit accompanying them, and bedewing men's hearts by them. And for the proof of this in general, you have that passage, Acts ix. 31, 'Then had the churches rest, and *were edified*, walking in the fear of the Lord.' And so it is said of churches walking in all the order and ordinances of Christ;

as of the Colossian church it is spoken (chap, ii.) that they did so; 'in the comfort of the Holy Ghost,' as the author of that edification and comfort by those ordinances.

I shall instance particularly in the main ordinances of our salvation, and shew how our profiting by them is from the Spirit.

In the preaching of the word we receive not only the fruits of the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit himself, by the hearing of faith, that is, by the hearing the gospel preached, which is the doctrine of truth: 'Our gospel came not to you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost,' 1 Thess. 1.5 ; 'I create the fruit of the lips, peace, and teach thee to profit,' namely, by the lips of those who by office are said to 'preserve knowledge,' Mal. 2. All which profiting is attributed to the Spirit: 1 Cor. xii. 7, 'But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.' It is the profit both of a man's self and others. And the Holy Spirit's care is very great herein; he is the *Providore General*, to oversee the overseers of the flock, and to see to it, provide the fittest stewards for every flock: Acts xx. 28, 'The flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.' And he furnisheth them with such gifts as shall best serve and most suitably agree unto their capacities, and the bore of their understandings, and to work on their hearts; and in providential grace disposeth of them and their gifts as shall be most agreeable to their spirits and spiritual condition. As some ministers are fitted for the profiting of the weak, so others to the wise; even as the apostle says he was a debtor to both, Rom. i. And then he takes a further special care of their forehand meditations and preparations, to suggest such materials and notions for their sermons as shall be a food most convenient for men's souls. They are 'stewards, that give meat in due season,' Mat. xxiv. 45. He fills the breasts of ministers (their spiritual nurses) with consolations and

other truths, suitable to the temper and constitution of their stomachs, and instructeth them to speak words in season; and this very often unknown to themselves that speak them, they not having any aim at thee or any other man in particular in such passages, which also are utterly unexpected to or perhaps not prayed for by him whom yet they greatly concern, when yet the Holy Ghost knew whom to direct those passages unto, and had set up thy heart as the mark to shoot those arrows into it.

Benjamin Keach: *Tropologia* 741: That prayer is a great ordinance, doth appear by the influences it hath over all graces. (1.) It is a means for getting grace; hereby a soldier of Christ obtains his armor. (2.) And for the increase of grace, in order to the acting of it. (3.) For the evidencing of grace. It is that which brings the soul into God's presence, and fills it with divine joy and peace in believing.

In 1697, Keach's church issued a summary of 2LCF. It re-orders and rephrases some matters. It's 20th article is entitled "Of the Means of Grace" and states,

WE believe that the outward and more ordinary means, whereby Christ communicates to us the Benefits of Redemption, are his Holy Ordinances, as Prayer, the Word of God, and Preaching, with Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, &c. and yet notwithstanding it is the Spirit of God that maketh Prayer, Reading, &c. and specially the Preaching of the Word, effectual to the convincing, converting, building up, and comforting, through Faith, all the Elect of God unto Salvation.

And that it is the Duty of all, that the Word may become effectual to their Salvation, to attend upon it with all

Diligence, Preparation, and Prayer, that they may receive it with Faith and Love, and lay it up in their Hearts, and practise it in their Lives.

Conclusion

Now we may return to where we began. Remember the words of 2LCF 26:4&5?

4. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, in whom by the appointment of the Father, all power for the calling, institution, order, or Government of the Church, is invested in a supream & sovereign manner

5. In the execution of this power wherewith he is so intrusted, the Lord Jesus calleth out of the World unto himself, **through the Ministry of his word, by his Spirit**, those that are given unto him by his Father; that they may walk before him in all the ways of obedience, which he prescribeth to them in his Word. Those thus called he commandeth to walk together in particular societies, or Churches, for their mutual edification; and the due performance of that publick worship, which he requireth of them in the World.

The ascended Lord, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given, employs the means of grace to save and sanctify His elect. It's a beautiful doctrine, and a necessary corollary to the doctrines of grace. Our God elects sinners, gives His own dear Son to redeem them, and sends His Spirit, who dwells in the assembled temple of His saints, to call them, grant them faith, and sanctify them. Reject the doctrine of the means of grace, and you no longer have a fully developed doctrine of grace.

Thank God that our salvation, from first to last, from eternity through time and to eternal life, is all of grace. Amen.