

Means of Grace Lesson #2

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 88. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption? The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Means of grace in Acts 2

Acts 2:38-42 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Calvin on Acts 2:42

Luke is recording those things which constitute the form of church visible to the public eye...

Matthew Henry on Acts 2:42:

They [the early church] kept close to holy ordinances, and abounded in all instances of piety and devotion, for Christianity, admitted in the power of it, will dispose the soul to communion with God in all those ways wherein he has appointed us to meet him and promised to meet us.

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

1) The apostles doctrine and fellowship

- Close connection of the church to the apostles, men who “had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). The apostles doctrine is the Old Testament scriptures and the teachings and life of Christ.
- Apostles were a brotherhood forming a new community, a new culture. Not an individualistic culture, but a rich fellowship distinguished by their doctrine, the Word of Christ, which they taught.
- Church today is defined by our closeness of sweet fellowship with other believers, with other churches, as far as we agree on what constitutes biblical faithfulness, or conformity to the apostles’ teaching.
- The church organization is not a means of grace itself, but forms the context for the administration of those means.

2) The breaking of bread

- Language of the Lord’s Supper
The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16)
- Context of means of grace - baptism, Word of God, and prayer all specifically referenced
- Church adhered to the sacramental ordinances of Christ as well as His teachings.

3) Prayer

- Church gathered for prayer, both corporate and individual, after the manner of the apostles.
- Prayer was first corporate practice of the apostles in book of Acts (1:14)
- Prayer was the context in which the Spirit fell

Means of grace as ordained by Christ

1) The Word

- John 20:21 *“So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”* Christ commissioned His disciples to act as His ambassadors, preaching the same message He did, adding only the facts of His completed work.
- Apostles were committed to giving themselves “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:41)
- Book of Acts closes with Paul “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” (28:31)

2) The sacraments

- Jesus ordained both New Testament sacraments.
- Mt. 28:19 shows Jesus dictating the permanent place baptism in his church, as well as the words of institution.
- John the Baptist’s use of water for baptism was brought over into the church (Acts 1:5, 8:36, 10:7, 11:16).
- Similarly, Luke 22:19-20 records for us Christ’s words of institution for the Lord’s Supper, which we read again in 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

3) Prayer

- Jesus also instituted prayer for his church.
- Jesus’ disciples explicitly ask him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk. 11:1). And thereupon he gave out the model prayer, which we know as “the Lord’s Prayer” (also Mt. 6:9).
- Jesus introduces the church to explicit Trinitarian prayer. He advised his disciples to pray to “the Father,” in both the Lord’s Prayer and in the upper room.
- In Jn 14:13 he advises them to pray “in my name” to the Father, which refers to the authority of Jesus to command what wills; so it also includes submission to his will.
- The church prays to Jesus in the following passages: Acts 1:24, 7:59, 9:10-17; 2 Cor. 12:8; 1 Thess. 3:11; 2 Thess. 2:16.