

Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

Topic 2 - The Doctrine of God
Lesson 31 - The Attributes of God: Grace
(Part 2 - The Means of Grace)

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The Means of Grace

- Fallen man receives all the blessings of salvation out of the eternal fountain of the grace of God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, and through the operation of the Holy Spirit.
- The Church may be represented as the great means of grace which Christ, working through the Holy Spirit, uses for the gathering of the elect, the edification of the saints, and the building up of His spiritual body.
- He qualifies her for this great task by endowing her with all kinds of spiritual gifts, and by the institution of the offices for the administration of the Word and sacraments, which are all means to lead the elect to their eternal destiny.
- She is not instrumental in communicating grace except by means of the Word.
- - Berkhof, pg. 583

The Means of Grace

- God uses various means to bring blessing, strengthen faith, and cultivate spiritual growth in the lives of His people. Historically, these have been called “the means of grace.” They are the instruments through which God’s Spirit graciously grows believers in Christlikeness as He fortifies them in the faith and conforms them into the image of the Son.
- Some limit these means of grace to the preaching of the Word and the observance of the Ordinances (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper). The New Testament teaches that God also promotes the spiritual welfare of His people through other means as well - including prayer, worship, fellowship, and the process of church discipline.
- - MacArthur, pg. 780-781

The Means of Grace

- The means of grace are any activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to Christians.
- Some theologians have restricted them to three: the preaching of the Word, and the two sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper).
- The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally taught that God's "grace" comes to people only through the official ministry of the Church, particularly through the priests. It has in view activities that are supervised and/or performed by only the priests. These include: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction (last rights), Holy Orders, and Matrimony.
- - Grudem, pg. 951-952

The Means of Grace

- There is not only a difference in the lists given by Catholics and Protestants; there is also a fundamental difference in meaning. Catholics view these as “means of salvation” that make people more fit to receive justification from God. But on a Protestant view, the means of grace are simply means of additional blessing within Christian life, and do not add to our fitness to receive justification from God.
- Catholics teach that the means of grace impart grace whether or not there is subjective faith on the part of the minister or the recipient.
- Protestants hold that God only imparts grace when there is faith on the part of the persons receiving these means.
- - Grudem, pg. 952

The Means of Grace - God's Word

- The primary means the Spirit of God uses to save sinners and sanctify saints is His Word.
- Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.
- John 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.
- Psalm 19:7a The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
- Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
- John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.
- 1 Peter 2:1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

The Means of Grace - God's Word

- To be filled with the Spirit is to let the Word of Christ dwell in your richly.
- See Ephesians 5:18-6:9 and Colossians 3:16-4:1.
- Galatians 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.
- Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

The Means of Grace - God's Word

- It is essential for churches to prioritize the ministry of the Word - reading, teaching, preaching, and even singing the Scriptures.
- Acts 6:4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”
- 1 Timothy 4:13 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.
- 2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
- Ephesians 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.
- Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

The Means of Grace - God's Word

- 2 Timothy 3:16 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 4:1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:
2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

The Means of Grace - Baptism

- Spirit Baptism - all believers are immersed into Christ at the moment of conversion.
- Romans 6:3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?
- Matthew 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
- Through this baptism of the Spirit believers are united with Christ and placed into His Body, the church. (1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13).
- This happens only once at the moment of salvation.

The Means of Grace - Baptism

- In order to symbolize outwardly the internal reality of salvation, the New Testament calls upon believers to be baptized in water as a public testimony to their faith in and solidarity with the Lord Jesus. Water baptism then is the outward, post conversion demonstration of an inward reality that has already occurred at conversion.
- Scripture presents baptism as the first steps of obedience for believers after they have embraced the Lord Jesus in saving faith.
- Those unwilling to confess their Lord and Savior publicly through baptism are living in disobedience and this call into question the genuineness of their faith because they are unwilling to obey.
- The proper mode of baptism is by immersion in water as indicated by the Greek word baptize. It serves then as a symbol of one's burial and resurrection with Christ.

The Means of Grace - Baptism

- Though baptism does not produce salvation it is closely associated with it. In the book of Acts those who believed were baptized immediately indicating that it should closely follow a genuine profession of faith.
- Believers are to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).
- Baptism is a means of grace in that it presents for us a picture of the work of the gospel as we have died with Christ, are born again to new life, and look forward to the resurrection He has promised those that believe in Him.

The Means of Grace - The Lord's Table

- The Lord's Table, Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is an ordinance commanded by Christ to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life.
- On the night He was betrayed, Jesus took and transformed the Passover meal, showing it's ultimate fulfillment as He is the spotless Lamb of God, crucified at the very hour the Passover Lamb's were sacrificed in Jerusalem.
- Communion was part of the observance of the early church as often as they gathered (Acts 2:42).

The Means of Grace - The Lord's Table

- Although believers ought to pursue holiness at all times, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is an occasion when they are to carefully examine themselves, confessing and repenting from any known sin before the Lord.
- Those who participate in the Supper without proper examination and confession profane the celebration and invite the chastisement of God.

The Means of Grace - The Lord's Table

- 1 Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

The Means of Grace - The Lord's Table

- The observance of the Lord's Supper is expected, and therefore not optional. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me."
- The bread and cup are symbolic of the Body and Blood of Christ. The bread is unleavened and so is the wine (through the process of fermentation), representing the sinless sacrifice as Christ is the spotless Lamb of God.
- This perpetual remembrance is a time for the church to commune with Christ and with each other, and is a symbolic preaching of the gospel to one another.
- 1 Cor. 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

The Means of Grace

- Other activities thought to be considered a means of grace include prayer, worship, fellowship, and the practice of church discipline (MacArthur).
- Others include giving, the use of spiritual gifts, evangelism, and personal ministry and discipleship (Grudem).
- The Classical Reformed view is that the means of grace include the preaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the sacraments. The three marks of a sound church then include these two, plus the practice of church discipline. These three marks must be present for the church to be considered orthodox and healthy.