

## The Means of Grace

### I. The question

- God has given the church a *really* big mission. How has God equipped us to do the mission?
  - The Holy Spirit: God with us, who suffuses all the rest of this list.
  - The means of grace: the word, sacraments, and prayer.
  - Special gifts for each member (see class #4).
  - Church officers, the Lord's day, and many other blessings!

### II. The means of grace

- Ray Ortlund: “the means of grace’ answers these questions: How do I, as a believer, access the grace of the Lord for my many needs? Where do I go, what do I do, to connect with the real help He gives to sinners and sufferers here in this world? I know I am saved by His grace alone. ... But, at a practical level, how do I come to Him for His grace?”<sup>1</sup>
  - WSC 88 asks the same question: “What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?” A: “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates 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.”
  - The means of grace are the places God has appointed “where He has concentrated His availability, like a gushing fountain of mercy for sinners who are so desperate that they are finally coming to Christ on His terms” (Ray Ortlund). Huge promises attend each of these means of grace!
- *Means of grace #1: The Preaching of the Scriptures*
  - This is how we receive forgiveness of sin and our heavenly inheritance—in short, our salvation (Acts 20:32; 26:18; Rom 1:16)!
  - The word gives us faith (Rom 10:17), joy (Ps 19:8), comfort (Isa 40:1), prosperity (Josh 1:8), and hope (Rom 15:4).
  - The word enlightens our eyes (Ps 19:8), especially into our own sinfulness (Ps 19:11–12; Heb 4:12).
  - The word builds us up in holiness (Acts 20:32) and gives us power to resist sin (Ps 119:9, 11), such that we are completely well-supplied for every good work (2 Tim 3:15–17).
  - It will not return to God without accomplishing its purpose (Isa 55:11).
- *Means of grace #2: The Sacraments*
  - In baptism and the Supper, Jesus says, “this one is ‘in’; marked as my own” (Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 10:17). The sacraments seal God’s promises to us as true and assure us of God’s love, that we are set apart from the world (see WCF 27.1).
  - They deepen our union with Christ: “The cup of blessing [is] a participation [sharing, communion] in the blood of Christ ... The bread that we break [is] a participation in the body of Christ” (1 Cor 10:16).
  - Robert Bruce: “we do not get a better Christ in the sacraments than we do in the Word, but we do often get Christ better; we get a stronger grasp on him through faith.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/ordinary-means-of-grace>

- *Means of grace #3: Prayer*
  - Prayer gives peace (Phil 4:7), protection (Phil 4:7), healing (Jam 5:16), forgiveness (2 Chr 7:14; 1 John 1:9), and all manner of grace (Luke 11:9; Heb 4:16).
  - Prayer is the key to insight and understanding (Prov 2:3–5; Jer 33:3).
  - God draws near to us in prayer (Ps 145:18).
  - He promises to answer our prayers (Matt 21:22; John 14:13–14).
- Clarifications:
  - Grace is not a substance that can be channeled (in contrast to the medieval Roman Catholic view). We can place ourselves “in the way” of God’s grace, but we cannot control God’s grace (example of Zaccheus; Luke 19:1–10).
  - These means are especially potent in corporate worship. In divine worship on the Lord’s day, we are gathering at the heavenly Mount Zion with the glorified Jesus (Heb 12:22–24).
  - 2 Pet 1:19–21: in the means of grace, we have something *better* than the mount of transfiguration, when the disciples beheld the glory of Jesus!
- Summary: the kingdom of God comes through preaching, the sacraments, and prayer!

### III. Applications

- What happens when the church looks to other things besides the means of grace to accomplish its mission?
  - Fads: movie clips and lasers and smoke machines and rock ‘n’ roll.
  - The church growth movement: consultants, marketing, business best-practices, and CEO pastors.
  - In short: a crass pragmatism that ignores the wisdom of God.
  - Beware the temptation to look to conferences (which echo the big tent revivals of the 1800s) as a substitute “mountain top” experience.
  - Ray Ortlund: “If we long for our churches to experience more of this awakening power in the gospel, the remedy is not to invent our own delivery systems for God’s grace.”
- This is why we have a simple sanctuary and do non-flashy things in worship.
  - Do we honestly believe that *hearing* is better than seeing (Exod 20:4)?
- What happens when Christians neglect the means of grace?
  - Obviously, not seeking the local church or according it much importance.
  - Not expecting much from the means of grace. Do you expect to be *transformed*? (Note: not the same as “wowed.”)
  - Not making it a priority, as if our sustenance depended on it.
- Why is it important that we embrace the non-flashy approach to church growth and individual growth?
  - Reliance on the Holy Spirit!
  - Expecting the ho-hum seasons (vs. a false guilt about not having a continual mountain-top experience.).
  - Patience when the means of grace don’t “work” immediately.
- What should we say to an individual who ignores the means of grace but wants us to help them fix their spiritual problems?