

THIRD AND FOURTH HEAD: ARTICLE 15. God is under no obligation to confer this grace upon any; for how can He be indebted to one who had no previous gifts to bestow as a foundation for such recompense? Nay, how can He be indebted to one who has nothing of his own but sin and falsehood? He, therefore, who becomes the subject of this grace owes eternal gratitude to God, and gives Him thanks forever... Further, with respect to those who outwardly profess their faith and amend their lives, we are bound, after the example of the apostle, to judge and speak of them in the most favorable manner; for the secret recesses of the heart are unknown to us. And as to others who have not yet been called, it is our duty to pray for them to God, who calls the things that are not as if they were. But we are in no wise to conduct ourselves towards them with haughtiness, as if we had made ourselves to differ.

I.e., God is indebted to no man, nor under any obligation to those whose only possession is their debt to Him. Thus, our response to salvation is only gratitude. And this humility and gratitude works itself out among the Church, those who profess faith in God and “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8). For those not in the Church, our first obligation on their behalf is prayer.

DOCTRINAL NOTE: Mercy and justice are mutually exclusive concepts. That is, salvation – being all of mercy – need not, that is, *should* not be bestowed on anyone; mercy is never deserved. Acknowledging and understanding this dichotomy – and what exactly God has done for us in the Gospel – should drive us to naught but humility and gratitude for such a precious gift!

THIRD AND FOURTH HEAD: ARTICLE 17. As the almighty operation of God whereby He brings forth and supports this our natural life does not exclude but require the use of means by which God, of His infinite mercy and goodness, has chosen to exert His influence, so also the aforementioned supernatural operation of God by which we are regenerated in no wise excludes or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and food of the soul. Wherefore, as the apostles and the teachers who succeeded them piously instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to His glory and to the abasement of all pride, and in the meantime, however, neglected not to keep them, by the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the influence of the Word, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline; so even now it should be far from those who give or receive instruction in the Church to presume to tempt God by separating what He of His good pleasure has most intimately joined together. For grace is conferred by means of admonitions; and the more readily we perform our duty, the more clearly this favor of God, working in us, usually manifest itself, and the more directly His work is advanced; to whom alone all the glory, both for the means and for their saving fruit and efficacy, is forever due. Amen.

I.e., God, in His sovereign grace and wisdom, has chosen to use means – *human* means – by which to bring about His saving purposes in this world. Yes, He has ordained the ends, but He has also ordained the means by which these ends are achieved.

Acknowledging this, we are to joyfully participate in the means by which men are saved and kept:

- Preaching and teaching and learning the Bible, God's word
- Personal evangelism
- Bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God (i.e., being a solid, consistent witness)
- Participation in the "sacraments" of baptism and the Lord's Supper (in the context of the Church)

We should expect that the more we do these things, the more impact we will see in regard to the fruit of our evangelism, owing all to the grace of God as He seeks His own glory in our midst.

DOCTRINAL NOTE: Let us simply say it again (so that it will be burned into our minds and hearts): God has not only ordained the ends (salvation of the Elect whom He has foreordained from the foundation of the world), but He has also ordained the means by which the Elect will come in. And the means is you and me and us!

We should never allow the faulty thinking of "well, God is going to bring the Elect to salvation anyway, so I'm just going to keep the Gospel to myself today," or, "well, God is sovereign and His will cannot be thwarted, so I'm just going to stop going to church and loving on the people of God," to infiltrate our minds and hearts! The Lord Jesus never thought or acted in this manner, neither did the Apostles, and neither has any of God's faithful witnesses through the centuries.

EVANGELISTIC WARNING: If God has ordained that *you* are the means by which one (or more) of His Elect will come to faith, then He will – like a loving Father (Hebrews 12) – make that happen in accordance with His loving discipline.

So, let us obey and thus evangelize, disregarding the consequences.