

Digging Deep: Exploring the Joy of Systematic Theology

Class 32: The Doctrine of Salvation, part 13

The Means of Grace

"... this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

John 17. 3

Our gracious Lord is not playing 'catch me if you can' with us. He has made Himself knowable & accessible in specific ways of His own wise choosing. His appointed avenues of blessing are the means of grace. God does not limit Himself to His wonderful means of grace. Jesus said that the wind of the Spirit "blows where it wishes" (John 3:8). But if we are wondering where we can be sure to find the Lord, the answer is His standard means of grace, made effective by His own living presence. His chosen means are not intended to restrict His availability, but the opposite. His chosen means identify 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.

David Mathis, Habits of Grace

Q: *What does God require of us that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?*

A: To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with diligent use of all outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.

Q: *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.

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 85, 88

I. What are the "Outward & Ordinary" Means of Grace?

... they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2. 41-42

A. The Word of God

- Jesus & the apostles taught that the Scriptures are the primary & indispensable means of salvation (Luke 16. 31; 44-45; Hebrews 4. 12-13).

Jesus said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24. 25-27

... as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3. 14-17

- The preaching of God's Word was central in the ministry of the Apostles (Acts 2. 22, 41; 4. 4; 5. 20; 6. 7; 12. 24; 15. 7, 32, 36; 16. 14; 19. 20; 20. 32). The Apostles placed the highest value on the Word of God as the means of the salvation and sanctification of believers (Col. 3. 16; Heb. 5. 14; James 1. 18, 21, 25; 1 Peter 2. 2).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...

Colossians 3.16

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 10. 17

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.

Westminster Shorter Catechism #89

B. The Sacraments

Q 43. What are sacraments or ordinances?

A 43. The sacraments or ordinances given by God and instituted by Christ, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper, are visible signs & seals that we are bound together as a community of faith by his death and resurrection. By our use of them the Holy Spirit more fully declares and seals the promises of the gospel to us.

New City Catechism

As the preaching of the Word makes the gospel audible, so the sacraments make it visible, and God stirs up faith by both means. If necessary, we can think of the Word as a means of grace without the sacraments, but it's almost impossible to think of the sacraments as a means of grace without the Word. The sacraments depend on Scripture, and the truth of Scripture speaks in & through them.

J.I. Packer

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 10.16

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

1 Corinthians 11. 27-29

... they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

1 Peter 3. 20-22

C. Prayer

*I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made ...
I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands ...*

1 Tim. 2:1, 8

... take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...

Ephesians 6. 17-18

*God has set the agenda for us. Preach the Word. Love people. Observe the ordinances. Gather. Disciple. Pray.
God does extraordinary things through the ordinary means of grace. Let's be faithful at doing the ordinary things that God has promised to bless.*