

## **CHAPTER 13** **(GOSPEL-DRIVEN USE OF THE MEANS OF GRACE\*)**

### **SUMMARY:**

Now that the Holy Spirit has renewed you, God calls you to live a holy life. To live this obedient life, you must continue to believe in Christ and walk in Him by faith. To live this life of faith, God calls you to diligently use all of the means of grace He has given you in His Word.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

DEF. OF "MEANS OF GRACE:" \*J.V. Fesko points out that strictly speaking the "means of grace" are restricted to Word and sacrament. Some Reformed theologians (e.g., Charles Hodge) have included prayer as a means of grace (see also WLC, Q. 154; WSC, Q. 88). This is correct if grace is defined broadly as God's favor. When grace is defined broadly, the means of grace may have a broader meaning as well. In this way, the means of grace would be defined as ordinary channels through which the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit come to the believer (Fesko, 278). Therefore, prayer and other activities may be included as means of grace.

However, if grace is defined narrowly as the person and work of Christ applied through the Spirit, then the means of grace must be restricted to Word and sacrament. Word and sacrament are the sole officially ordained objective means of grace through which the Holy Spirit delivers Christ and all His saving benefits to the believer. Both Word and sacrament are forms of divine revelation. Prayer, on the other hand, is not divine revelation (278). These two understandings of the means of grace are complimentary, not antithetical (279).

It is also important to understand the distinction between the "means of grace" and the "means of gratitude" (i.e., means of obedience). The "means of grace" are Word and sacrament (i.e., "creaturely media—preaching, water, wine and bread, J.F.) through which the Spirit delivers Christ and all of His saving benefits. We are effectually called into union with Christ by the preaching of the gospel. Through this ministry of the word the Spirit gives us faith in Christ. He further ratifies (confirms, assures) His gracious promise by means of baptism and the Lord's Supper which are the signs and seals of the covenant of grace," (Horton, Pilgrim Theology, p. 344). The "means of gratitude" (means of obedience) are "our appropriate response to the gift that is given to us through the means of grace. Chief among these is prayer,

as well as witness, mutual instruction and admonition (including singing, Col. 3:16), church discipline, meditation on God's word, and service to others (our families, fellow saints, and neighbors)," (Ibid, p. 344). It is vital to remember that indicatives come before imperatives. Prayer, offering out service and gifts, personal and family worship, Bible reading, fellowship with other believers, sharing the gospel with others—these are all important responses of gratitude, but they are not means of grace, strictly speaking (Horton, People and Place, 249).

It is important to keep these distinctions in mind when reading Marshall. When Marshall uses the term "*means*," he combines both "means of grace" and "means of gratitude." Thus, in some instances, when Marshall refers to the "means of grace" he is speaking of means of gratitude (the modern term for the means of gratitude is "spiritual disciplines," e.g., Know the Word of God; Self-examination; Meditation; Prayer; Singing; Fasting; Vows; Fellowship and communion with the saints). Preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper are not our means of commitment/gratitude. Rather, they are means of grace (i.e., God's acts of delivering Christ and all His saving benefits to us). By these "means of grace" God sweeps us into His unfolding drama of redemption together with His saints. As Marshall writes, the "means of grace" are not what you do to attain holiness; they are what bring you into a deeper fellowship with Christ who makes you more holy." p. 191

THE MAIN POINT OF THIS CHAPTER: "These are the means of grace that God commends to you in His Word. In themselves they do not make you holy; they draw you into deeper fellowship with Christ, the True Vine, who makes you holy as you abide in Him. What good reason to diligently make use of these means of grace to the glory of God!" p. 224

- A. TWO NECESSARY PREREQUISITES TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE MEANS OF GRACE BEFORE DISCUSSING THEM:
  - 1. Though living a life of faith in Christ attains/achieves/procures holiness, this does not void the use of the means of grace rather it establishes their use. p. 191
  - 2. It is crucial to use the means of grace in the right way. p. 193
- B. 6 NECESSARY QUALIFICATIONS: pp. 193-194

1. Helps to the life of faith in its beginning, continuance, and growth
2. As instruments subservient to faith (keeping in mind that faith is the Principle instrument in all acts and exercises of the means of grace and that faith is the sole means by which the soul receives Christ and walks in all holiness by Him)
3. Beware of using them in opposition rather than in subordination to faith so that they do not become a hindrance but serve as helps to our faith.
4. We must not idolize any of the means and put them in the place of Christ, like the RCC/legalists do! The means do not confer grace to the soul.
5. They are not to be performed as conditions for the procuring of the favor of God and the salvation of Christ.
6. They must not be accounted as absolutely necessary for salvation as if true faith were void and of none effect when we cannot partake of them.

**PROPOSITION:** 10 WAYS HOW TO PROPERLY USE THE MEANS OF GRACE GOD HAS GIVEN IN SCRIPTURE:

**LESSON:**

- I. KNOW THE WORD OF GOD (that we may be made wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus 2 Tim. 3:15) pp. 194-196
- II. SELF-EXAMINATION of our state and life according to the Word of God, pp. 196-201

Mark well and understand these two questions: p. 198

- A. Even though I am a vile sinner, will God save me through Christ? (NOTE: This question you must answer, "Yes," with confident faith in Christ.)

- B. Have I already come into a state of salvation? (NOTE: This question must be answered by self-examination.)
- III. MEDITATION on the word of God, pp. 201-202
- IV. THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM, pp. 203-205
- 3 Cautions concerning Baptism:*
- A. Beware of turning baptism into a Covenant of Works, p. 203
  - B. Beware of making baptism an idol by putting it in the place of Christ. p. 203
  - C. Beware of making baptism an equal partner with faith in your salvation. p. 203
- V. THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER, pp. 205-208
- A. 2 Reasons why some disregard the Lord's Supper and get no benefit:
    - 1. Some think God is only holding out bare signs and symbols of Christ and His salvation. p. 206-207
    - 2. They are afraid to partake! p. 207-208
  - B. 4 Abuses of the Lord's Supper: p. 208
    - 1. Beware of setting it in opposition to the life of faith
    - 2. Beware of putting the Lord's Supper in the place of Christ
    - 3. Beware of thinking it so necessary that you cannot have true faith without it
    - 4. Beware of holding to transubstantiation
- VI. PRAYER is to be used of as a means of living by faith in Christ, according to the new man. pp. 208-215
- 8 guidelines to enable us to pray rightly: pp. 210-213

- A. You must pray with your hearts and spirits (Isa. 26:9; John 4:24) where the Spirit of Christ, and of prayer, principally resides (Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:17); with understanding (1 Cor. 14:15-16); for we are renewed in knowledge (Col. 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:3); so that praying in ignorance cannot sanctify. And it must be with sincere hearty desire of the good things we ask in prayer; for God sees the heart (Ps. 62:8). p. 210-211
- B. You must pray in the Name of Christ, pp. 211-212
- C. You must not think to be accepted for the goodness of your prayers, and trust on them as works of righteousness; which is making idols of your prayers and putting them in the place of Christ, p. 212
  - 1. By reason of the holiness of the form, "Some ignorant Protestants trust on their prayers as duties of righteousness; and they think one prayer to be more acceptable than another, by reason of the holiness of the form...especially the Lord's Prayer." p. 113, original; p. 212, revised
  - 2. Others use prayer as "a spell or charm to drive away the devil." p. 114, 212
  - 3. By reason of the holiness of the place (John 4:21, 24; 1 Tim. 2:8) p. 212
  - 4. Others trust on their much speaking (Matt. 6:7) p. 212
- D. Pray to God as your Father, through Christ your Savior. Come to prayer in faith that your sins really are forgiven, that you are accepted by God, and that you have obtained all other things you need for your salvation (James 1:5-7; 5:15; 1 John 5:14; Mark 11:24; Heb. 10:14; Psalm 62:8; 86:7; 65:16; 67:1; 17:6) p. 114, 212-213
- E. Ask God to enable you to live by faith, so that His grace will sanctify you. p. 114, 213
- F. Strive to bring your soul into order by prayer, no matter how distressed you are by guilt, anguish, inordinate cares, or fears (Philip. 4:6-7) p. 213

- G. Use the whole matter and manner of prayer to bring your heart and soul into a holy frame of mind. pp. 213
  - H. Do not confine and limit your prayers to prescribed forms of prayers. p. 214-215
- VII. SINGING OF PSALMS, pp. 215-217
- Songs must be sung in the right manner:
- A. Do not trust in the melody of your voice, as if that pleased God, who only delights in the melody of the heart (Col. 3:16). p. 216
  - B. Use singing for the same purpose as meditation and prayer, according to the nature of what is sung- to kindle your faith...to take joy and delight in the Lord and to glory in God. p. 216
  - C. Particularly use the Psalms for singing. p. 216
- VIII. FASTING is commended to us in the New Testament (Matt. 9:15; 17:21; 1 Cor. 7:5) pp. 217-218
- 3 guidelines for proper fasting:
- A. Do not trust in fasting as meriting the grace or favor of God. p. 217
  - B. Use fasting to help you in special, extraordinary times of prayer and repentance. p. 218
  - C. Only use fasting to accomplish its right purpose. p. 218
- IX. Vows, p. 218 (Not Recommended! No one can keep their own promises/vows, i.e., laws, let alone God's Law.)
- X. FELLOWSHIP AND COMMUNION WITH THE SAINTS (Acts 2:42) pp. 218-224
- A. This means must be used diligently. pp. 117-118 (Note: This first point is taken from the original edition)

1. First, in general, God ordinarily saves people through or in a church. p. 219
  2. Secondly, in particular, fellowship with other Christians promotes holiness in many ways, p. 219-220
    - a. The Word and Sacraments, p. 219
    - b. Mutual prayer, p. 220
    - c. Mutual admonition, instruction, consolation, p. 220
    - d. External supports, which are meant to help reduce suffering, p. 220
    - e. Excommunication/church discipline/ministry of restoration, p. 220
    - f. The examples of other Christians to teach and encourage you, 220
    - g. Godly discourse, teaching, admonishing, comforting others in Christ, p. 221
    - h. Mutual ministry to other members, doing good to other believers, p. 221
- B. This means must be used rightly, for the attaining of holiness only in Christ. pp. 118-120, original; p. 221, revised (Note: This second point is taken from the original edition)

5 principles to keep in mind in order to use church fellowship correctly for the attaining of holiness: pp. 221-224

1. Do not trust in church membership in and of itself, or in any kind of a relationship with any church, to commend you to God. pp. 221-222
2. Do not follow any church further than you may follow in the way of Christ. p. 222
3. Do not think you must attain a certain level of grace before you join yourself in full communion with a church of Christ. p. 222-223

4. Keep fellowship and communion with a church for the sake of fellowship and communion with Christ (1 John 1:3; Zech. 8:23). pp. 223-224
5. Do not leave your church during a time of persecution. p. 224

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