

# Firm Foundation

## Means of Grace

### Introduction

God asked no one's advice concerning Christ's substitutionary satisfaction and His singular method of reconciliation.

In the same way -- He gave us the Means of Grace -- without any solicited advice from man. Two things can be concluded by way of establishing presuppositions.

1. *He confers on man the forgiveness of sins merited by Christ.*
2. *He works faith in the pro-offered remission of sins – or strengthens faith where faith already exists.*

Matt. 23:37 and Solid Declaration, Article II, Line 57-58 (page 532)

What are the Means of Grace?

1. *The Word of the Gospel, (this does not include the Law).*
2. *The Sacrament of Holy Baptism*
3. *The Sacrament of the Altar.*

A two-fold power exists in these Means. of Grace. (Sol. Dec. page 532; line 57-56)

1. *An exhibiting, conferring, or imparting of power. Means of Grace is the only way men can know of the Love of God for all people in Christ.*
2. *As a result of Number 1, an operative power exists. Through the MoG the Holy Spirit works and strengthens faith in forgiveness.*

MEN FIGHT THIS MEANS OF GRACE, ordained by God. Critics say that this method is unworthy for both God and man.

### CATEGORIES

Catholic-----Lutheran-----Reformed

The different views.

1. *Some say God should not bind Himself to these things because the Holy Spirit does not need a vehicle to operate. Means of Grace gets in the way.*
2. *Others try to improve the Means of Grace.*

What will we discover by examining these other categories? *We will discover that an aberration in this doctrine directly effects the central doctrine of the Christian faith – Justification by Faith. (How) When the Means of Grace are impaired, works take Christ's place in salvation*

1. The Means of Grace in General
2. All Means of Grace Have the Same Purpose and the Same Effect
3. The Number of Sacraments
4. False Teaching on the Means of Grace
5. The Importance of the Christian Doctrine of the Means of Grace
6. The Means of Grace in the Old Testament
7. The Means of Grace and Prayer

## 1 The Means of Grace in General

The understanding of the Means of Grace begins with the understanding of the work of Christ. Unfortunately, this term, "the work of Christ", has been given many different connotations.

What are some of those different connotations? *Some say the work of Christ is not perfect and must be supplanted by man. Others say that Christ's work was complete but insufficient. (He did all that He could possibly do.)*

What is the starting point -- the way of Scripture -- in this discussion? *Objective (universal) Justification.*

Describe this concept. *John 3:16 -*

Look up 2 Cor. 5:19. What is the first Means of Grace? *The Word of Reconciliation*

Does this include the Law of God? *No*

Why is this so? *The Law does not assure anyone of the forgiveness of sin.*

Look up 2 Cor. 3:9. Paul describes the Law and Gospel.

The Law is called " the ministration of condemnation "

The Gospel is called " the ministration of righteousness " (to be understood in a forensic way.

Two things must be kept in mind:

1. The Gospel is the Means of Grace in the sense that God is ready to forgive

2. The Gospel is the hearing of that forgiveness (absolution)

The Gospel is the means of Grace in every form that it reaches man:

1. (Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47) Preached

2. (John 20:31; 1 John 1:3-4) Printed

3. (John 20:23) Expressed (spoken) as formal Absolution

4. (John 3:14-15) Pictured in Symbols or Types

5. (Romans 10:8) Pondered on the heart

Some Theologians have contended that only the Preached Word is the Means of Grace. They cite Paul, who says, "Faith comes by hearing..." They also say that mission work would be easy through simple shipping of books in native languages if it was more than this.

This is not Scriptural. What is Jesus doing in the following two verses?

John 5:39 Jesus equates the written and the spoken Word.

John 5:46 Again, Jesus equates the written and the spoken Word.

What does the Formula of Concord say concerning this issue? Page 530-1 line 50,53\_\_\_\_\_

It also equates the written word with the spoken word.

God has also attached the promise of forgiveness of sins to certain external acts which He has ordained. What are these external acts?

Acts 2:38; 22:16 Baptism: takes place "for the forgiveness of sins" or "to wash away sins."

Luke 22:19-20; Matt. 26:26-28 Body given and Blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. This means that Baptism

*and the Lord's Supper are Means of Grace.*

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Because these actions with which the forgiveness of sins is connected are visible, these rites, in distinction from the Word of the Gospel, have been called "verbum visibile" (visible word).

Consider that these touch every receptacle sense that a human has. The eye, the ear, the aroma, the touch and the taste.

What does this suggest regarding God's desire for people to know of His Gospel? \_\_\_\_\_

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## 2

### **All Means of Grace Have the Same Purpose and the Same Effect**

According to the Scripture, all means of grace have the same purpose and effect. List the purposes:

1. *Announces God's forgiveness*

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2. *Creates Faith in people*

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3. *Strengthens Faith where faith exists already.*

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We have shown this in the Scriptures on page four of our guide. What does the Book of Concord say concerning this?

Augs Conf. Art V, line 1-4, page 31. *To fulfill the "ministration of righteousness"*

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Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation. None of God's promises are removed!

Not all people will agree with this, that is, the Word and Sacraments having the same purpose and effect. Some say that Baptism is different because it regenerates (through a symbolic drowning of the Old Man) and the Word does not. Is this conclusion Scriptural?

Titus 3:5 *In Baptism there is regeneration*

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1 Peter 1:23 *In the Word there is regeneration as well.*

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Others will say that the Lord's Supper is different than both the Word and Baptism in that it gives a special physical effect. They will say that the resurrection of the body is directly connected with this sacrament. This is not the purpose of this sacrament. What is the purpose?

Matthew 26:28 *for the forgiveness of sin.*

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Luther on the remembrance of Me: "I hope it is not necessary to say much as to what the remembrance of Christ might be. In other places we have often and amply explained this term. It is not such a contemplation of the suffering as some practice, hoping by such a good work to render services to God and to obtain grace by occupying themselves in sorrowing over the bitter sufferings of Christ, etc.. The remembrance of Christ rather consists in teaching and believing the power and fruit of His suffering; accordingly, that our works and merit are worthless, that the free will is dead and list, that on the contrary, we are absolved from our sin and become righteous solely through Christ's suffering and death; hence that the remembrance consists in teaching or recalling the grace of God in Christ and not in a work done by us."

The Book of Concord stresses emphatically that the Sacraments have no other purpose than the Word of the Gospel, namely, the testifying and conferring of the forgiveness of sins and the birth and growth of faith.

Read Apology, Art XIII, line 4-5; page 211. What does this say? *This says that the sacraments*

*(Baptism and the Lord's Supper) have the same purpose and effect as well.*

Read lines 18-20 on page 213. What does this say? *The Means of Grace is operative in faith.*

So all the Means of Grace have the same function and purpose. If the Word is all sufficient then why did God give us Baptism and the Lord's Supper? Well, both the Scriptures and experience teach us that men who feel the weight of their sins, find nothing harder to believe than the forgiveness of their sins. Repetition of the assurance of the forgiveness of sins in various ways through the Means of Grace meets a practical need of Christians.

Read Smalcald Articles, Part III Art IV, page 310.

What does this say? *God gives to us abundantly through the Means of Grace. Forgiveness is communicated in each: 1) the Word; 2) Baptism; 3) Lord's Supper*

### 3

## The Number of Sacraments

Arguing about the number of sacraments is pointless until agreement is reached on the definition of a sacrament. (Since the word sacrament is not a Biblical, but an ecclesiastical term, we use it in Christian liberty to designate such acts as have God's command, divinely appointed visible elements, and the promise of the remission of sins.) If we describe it as such, then there are two Sacraments; Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

If we were to omit the visible element then Absolution, too, is a sacrament (see Ap, Art, XIII, 4, p.211). But the stricter definition is used most often (see L.C., of Baptism, line 1, p. 436).

The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Catholic Church have seven sacraments. List them:

1. *Baptism*

2. Lord's Supper
3. Confirmation – connected to baptism (reaffirmation of baptismal commitments)
4. Penance – not contrition to faith but 1) man-made sorrow; 2) Conf to Priest; 3) Penance.
5. Extreme Unction (“last Anointing”) – Anointing with oil, Mk 6:13, Jas 5:14, (strength from faith – not oil)
6. Order – Ordination: to confer the power to sacrifice the body and blood of Christ (Ap Art 13, L 7-13)
7. Matrimony – Ap. Art 13, L 14-15

What these church bodies mean by Confirmation, Penance, Extreme Unction, and Ordination of Priests lacks the mandate of God (*mandatum Dei*). While it is true that Matrimony is a divine institution, its promise is not forgiveness of sins, but rather the propagation of the human race.

## 4 False Teachings On The Means of Grace

As we said before: The teachings of church bodies and theologians on the means of grace always correspond to their teaching on Christ's work of reconciliation. If they mutilate the Scripture doctrine of the perfect reconciliation of all mean by the substitutionary satisfaction of Christ, they cannot correctly present the Scripture doctrine of the means of Grace. These cease to be the way of justification (media justifications) and become no more than means of stimulating such changes of minds and conduct as would make man completely his own savior.

### Roman on the Means of Grace

In short, the means of grace are not used in the same sense through which God offers to faith the complete forgiveness of sins and the salvation merited by Christ, and through that offer also works faith in man or strengthens the faith already present, endeavors as can gradually and in constantly increasing measure win God's grace for him.

Considering this, why have the Catholics formulated seven means of grace? *The Gospel is a threat and cannot be handled by men. Man can handle the Law: they need things for men to do.*

Even though this view is not Scriptural, are the Scriptural means of grace at work here? *Yes*

How do you know? *Because of the promises of God – Rom 10:17*

As Christians, how do we respond to this view? *We call this a fortunate inconsistency – fortunate in that the*

Gospel is proclaimed and yet inconsistent with Scripture.

Why are the Means of Grace such a threat to the Catholic Church? If the Bible were only law then there would not be a problem. But it is also Gospel. Years ago, English Catholics called a translation "a certain heretical and damnable book called the 'New Testament.'" The Gospel gives freedom to men.

### **Calvinism on the Means of Grace**

The Reformed Churches deny that Scripture teaches universal Grace and insist that the grace of God is confined to a limited number of people. (This is called particular grace, or limited grace.) Those people are called the elect. The elect are the ones who will go to heaven according to Calvin.

This being the case, the Reformed Churches must teach, in order to be consistent, that there are no real Means of Grace for the non-elect. In other words, those whom God has determined are destined to hell can find no comfort in the forgiveness of sins which Christ earned for them on the cross. According to Calvin we are able to determine with certainty who and who is not elected.

Calvin does not believe in the Means of Grace for the elect either. It is not through the Call of the Gospel, (that is preaching and teaching the Word of Reconciliation) that the believer knows he will be saved. Rather, according to Calvin, the believer has a special call which consists in an inner illumination by the Holy Spirit. It is impossible for believers to know their election from the external Word of the Gospel because through that Word, according to Calvin's view, God invites not only the elect, but also "those to whom He intends it as a savor of death and an occasion of heavier condemnation." So the non-elect and the elect have no choice but to reject the Means of Grace, since its invitation may be meant for damnation instead of salvation, and to place their trust in the special call of the inner illumination of the Spirit.

Considering this, what motivates the Calvinist to want to worship, witness, study, etc?

It is the Law. All men (elect or not) are to give glory to the Almighty God regardless of saving faith.

Even though this view is not Scriptural, are the Means of Grace at work here? Yes

How do you know? The promises of God: Rom 10:17

As Christians, how do we respond to this view? Fortunate Inconsistency

It has been said that two views on opposite ends of the spectrum are often very similar, While Roman and Calvin may be using different terminology, they are headed in the same direction. Can you identify that direction?

Rome takes saving Grace to mean that which the priest puts into man – so long as man does not interfere.

Calvin takes saving grace as coming like lightning. Both, then, see saving grace as a good quality implanted in man (innate goodness). Calvinists often define saving grace correctly (Christ's work of reconciliation) but they deny universal justification and thereby deny means of grace and forgiveness for all mankind.

There are other areas of error in which we could spend much time. Other areas could include the:

- 1) synergists,
- 2) deniers of the complete Vicarious Satisfaction, and
- 3) "enthusiasts."

However, we will touch on the first and possibly mention the second of this list of three errors.

Synergism (the belief that man has power to move toward God) is a perversion against which virtually no denomination has immunity (including us). This error is more directly understood as a denial, either partial or total, of the means of grace by its denial of the sola gratia or salvation by grace alone. It ascribes salvation in part to the virtuous efforts of many to apply himself to, or to decide for grace. It looks upon the means of grace as an incentive by which the sinner is induced or encouraged to convert himself through the divine powers communicated to him.

As we stated on page two of this study, the Means of Grace is directly related to the understanding of the Work of Christ. We understand correctly that the Work of Christ is total and complete (Vicarious Satisfaction). This Work of Christ -- this Justification -- is communicated through the Means of Grace. The synergist who, by definition, must say that he participated in his own JUSTIFICATION then must deny the Means of Grace, if not totally, then in part. This means that he is obliged to reconcile himself to God by "trying to keep the commandments of God." To say it another way, he thinks he must keep the law in order to be acceptable to God rather than living in the perfect righteousness of Christ by faith alone.

In terms of witnessing, what kind of difficulties arise from a proper understanding of the Work of

Christ? People believe they need to make a decision for Jesus. "If you walk the Aisle and say the sinners prayer" then you are saved. This is a problem. Read Luther's explanation of the third article in the Small Catechism.

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How should we get around this? Remember the dynamic of the parable of the sower. There is a sower (one who communicates the Gospel) a seed (the word of Gospel) and the soil (the heart receiving the Gospel).

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Finally, we address ourselves. To remain properly humble while firmly rejecting all erroneous teachings on the means of Grace, we should remind ourselves how even Christians who teach and, as a rule, also believe, the correct doctrine of the Means of Grace in their personal practice very often lose sight of the means of Grace.



This is done whenever they have the certainty of grace, or of the forgiveness of sin, of their feelings of grace, instead of on God's promise in the objective means of Grace.

Christianity is an absolutely unique religion. It is the only religion in creation that does not make salvation contingent upon its recipient keeping a law. Therefore, salvation is totally in God's hands. Salvation is the acquired righteousness of Christ; in other words, the forgiveness of sins which God pledges to us for Christ's sake in the Means of Grace. It is upon this that our faith is based.

## 5

### The Importance of the Christian Doctrine of the Means of Grace

Let us read what Luther wrote concerning the importance of the Christian Doctrine of the Means of Grace in the Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VIII. 3-10, page 312-313.

Some people would be offended at this but it does not exceed the bounds of truth.

In nature, it is true, God operated everywhere.

Col. 1:17 *by Him all things are held together*

Acts 17:25 *God gives life and breath and all things to everyone*

Acts 17:28 *We are His offspring: In Him we live and move and have our being.*

Acts 14:17 *He provides rain and food: He supplies our need.*

But the remission of sins for Christ's sake and faith in this remission, regeneration unto spiritual life and all the spiritual gifts connected with it, God will give only through the means of Grace He has ordained, through the Word of the Gospel and the Sacraments. Thus Luther would say, "God is in the tree, but He is not in the tree *pro me*."

John 17:20 *the members of the church will believe through their Word.*

1 Peter 1:23 *we are regenerated by the Word.*

Titus 3:5 *we are regenerated by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.*

Mark 16:15-16 *as a result, we are commissioned to preach the Gospel, using words.*

Luke 24:47 *to preach repentance and remission of sin to all people.*

Luke 1:78-79 *As a result we describe those nations not having the Gospel as in darkness.*

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Is. 9:2 *People without the Gospel walk in darkness*

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Is. 60:2 *People without the Gospel are in deep darkness*

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Acts 14:17 *this is true even through God leaves evidence of His existence: Natural Revelation does not equal salvation.*

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1 Peter 3:1 *those outside the church are "outside the Word" Natural Knowledge does not equal salvation.*

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1 Tim. 6:3-4 *this vindicates the sharp language of the confessions.*

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Scripture binds all knowledge of Christians truth to the Word -- that is Christ.

John 8:31-32 *if you live in My Word, you will know the truth and you will be my disciples*

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1 Cor. 2:4-5 *The Holy Spirit creates faith through the Word.*

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1 Peter 1:23 *The Holy Spirit creates faith and regeneration through the Word.*

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Gal 3:2, 5 *The Holy Spirit works through the hearing of Word in faith.*

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1 Cor. 1:18 *The word of the cross in the power of God.*

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Hence, actually everything that is regarded as brought about by the Holy Spirit without the Word is fictitious, "illusory," "self-produced." The experience one has, or imagines, without the means of Grace is not the product of the Holy Spirit, but is man-made.

Luther explains that the practical result of ignoring the importance of the means of Grace can only be despair. We must learn daily anew, to cling to the external Word of the Gospel against all our feelings and perceptions. He says: "Over all that our senses feel and perceive, we must learn to cling to the Word and simply judge according to it.... For if you insist on judging according to what you see and feel and when you are told God's Word, urge your opposite feelings and say: You have good talking, but my heart talks quite another language and if you felt what I feel, you too would talk differently, etc.: then God's Word is not in your heart, but by your own thoughts, reason, and musings you have smothered and extinguished it. In short, if you will not esteem the Word above all your feelings, eyes, senses, and heart, you will inevitably be lost, and there is no help for you... I also feel my sin, and the Law, and the devil on my neck, that I lie prostrate under it as under a heavy load. But what should I do? Were I to judge according to such feelings and my strength, I and all men would have to despair and perish. But if I desire to be helped, I must verily face about and look at the Word and learn from it to say: I indeed feel God's wrath, the devil, and hell; but the Word says otherwise, namely, that I have a gracious God through Christ who is my Lord, superior to the devil and all creatures." (St. L. VIII:1102)

## The Means of Grace In the Old Testament

The Gospel of Christ, the divine message of the remission of sins by faith in Christ, was the Means of Grace for the whole era of the Old Testament.

Acts 10:43 *The Prophets give witness to Christ – forgiveness of sins*

John 8:56 *Abraham believed in Christ.*

John 5:46 *Moses wrote of Christ*

Gal 3:7 *N.T. Christians are “sons of Abraham” because of the same object of faith.*

Rom. 3:21 *Justification by faith – not law – was taught by the prophets.*

Rom. 4 *this is devoted to sharing the Doc of Justification – not limited to the N.T.*

Gal 3:17 *The promise of Christ remains the means of grace, even under the law.*

John 5:45-47 *Jesus traces the Jews unbelief to Moses’ Scripture.*

Luke 24:25 *The word we believe is the word of the Prophets.*

Gen 3:15 *The is the first promise that God made to man about Christ. It was understood by Adam and Eve.*

*(Note Gen 4:1) In Gen 3:15, we have the substance of 2 Cor 5:19: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.”*

## 7

## The Means of Grace and Prayer

The main points of Scripture's teaching regarding prayer are covered in the section on sanctification and good work's. We will limit our discussion here to the question of whether prayer should be placed beside the Word and Sacraments as a means of Grace.

Some people say that the means of Grace include the Word, Sacraments, and prayer. Others say that God instituted as means of Grace "prayer, searching the Scriptures, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and Christian conference."

In contrast to this we read: "It is confusing and to be rejected when recent theologians... classify also prayer in the name of Jesus with the Means of Grace. Things objective and subjective, divine and human acts, must not be co-ordinate and confounded in this way."

This second statement is correct. It can be further explained this way. Word and Sacraments are the Means through which God deals with us men, that is, imparts to men the remission of sins earned by Christ. Through these means He creates and strengthens faith in them. Word and Sacraments are, as Luther was accustomed to say, something God does to us. Prayer, on the other hand, is something we do toward God. **Prayer is an exercise of the faith of Christians.** As a result, it falls into the category of sanctification.

What is the danger of saying that prayer is a means of Grace? Men are led to believe that God has not fully reconciled the world to Himself by Christ and that to achieve this forgiveness, more than faith is needed.

As we said before, people do object to this. They will use the Scripture to support their view.

Matt. 7:7 generally applied to all things.

Luke 11:4 Jesus says to ask for forgiveness (The 5<sup>th</sup> petition)

What is the Scriptural response to this formulation? True, we obtain also remission of sins through prayer; however, not because prayer is a work performed by man, but because there is present in prayer "forgive us our sins", that is, a divinely created desire for the grace of God in Christ, namely faith in the Gospel promise.

We now see what relationship faith, as it prays for forgiveness of sins, assumes toward the completed propitiation of Christ and toward the Means of Grace. It does not ignore the Means of Grace. It does not want to displace them. Actually, the opposite happens. It makes Christ's work and the Means of Grace the grounds on which it stands. The Christian prays that God would forgive his sins for Christ's sake according to His gracious promise in the Word.

Knowing what we do about the Calvinists, why would they count prayer with the Word and

Sacraments as a means of Grace? Because of a denial of universal grace and the assumption of the Spirit working externally (outside the Means of Grace) they cannot show men the promise of the objective word. They must refer the sinner to the Law through prayer and other things that induce good feelings, etc.

Knowing what we do about synergists, Lutheran and otherwise, why would they want prayer to be a

Means of Grace? Because it depends on what man does. Underneath this practice there always lies--consciously or unconsciously--denial of the complete reconciliation of the whole world by Christ and a denial that the Word and Sacraments creates and strengthens faith.