

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE

“Perspective Drives Purpose”

Michael Horton, *Ordinary*:

American Christianity is a story of perpetual upheavals in churches and individual lives. Starting with the extraordinary conversion experience, our lives are motivated by a constant expectation for The Next Big Thing. We're growing bored with the ordinary means of God's grace, attending church week in and out. Doctrines and disciplines that have shaped faithful Christian witness in the past are often marginalized or substituted with newer fashions or methods. The new and improved may dazzle us for the moment, but soon they have become “so last year.”

Review Notes:

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR MYSTICAL UNION WITH CHRIST & THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE

John Murray in *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, wrote,

Union with Christ is a great mystery...[yet] we are liable to use the word to designate something that is completely unintelligible and of which we cannot have any understanding. That is not the sense of scripture...nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ...union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*:

It is a most intimate union with God by the Holy Spirit, a union of persons, an unbreakable and eternal covenant between God and ourselves...it is so close that it transforms humans in the divine image and makes them participants in the divine nature.

We are in Christ: 2 Cor. 5:17; John 15:4, 5, 7; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 12:2; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:4, 2:10; Phil. 3:9; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 John 4:13

Christ is in Us: Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Eph. 3:17

Both combined:

John 6:56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

1John 4:13 ¶ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

WHAT ARE THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE?

Are not instituted by man:

“God alone is the distributor of grace and he alone can bind its distribution to the means ordained by him.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*

R. Scott Clark in *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* noted, “The Standards return repeatedly to the notion that it is God’s will to use means to accomplish his will.”

Definition:

- **Ordinary**
 - Contrast to extraordinary
 - Balaam’s Donkey
 - Angels
 - Flaming bush
- **Means of Grace**

1689 LBC Chapter 14, Paragraph 1, *Saving Faith*:

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word; by which also, and by administration of

baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, and other means appointed by God, it is increased and strengthened.

The Westminster Larger Catechism question 154 asks:

What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation? And answers: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments and prayer; all of which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE:

In Acts 2:23, Peter preached “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men,” and in verse 41 we read, “. . . there were added that day (to the church) about three thousand souls.”

Acts 2:42 tells us that the whole church “devoted” itself to the ordinary means of grace: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

1Tim. 4:13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

2Tim. 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Matt. 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Matt. 26:26 ¶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.”

Matt. 26:27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you,

Matt. 26:28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

1Cor. 11:25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

1Cor. 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

1Tim. 2:1 ¶ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,

1Tim. 2:8 ¶ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

MEANS OF GRACE & OUR POSITION OR UNION IN CHRIST?

These ordinary means of grace provide a constant sign and seal of our union with Christ.

THE WORD as a means of grace

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*

The first and most important means of grace is the word of God . . . for the word of God, both as law and gospel, is the revelation of the will of God, the promulgation of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

All the knowledge which is obtained by the recipient of divine grace, is wrought in him by means of the Word and is derived from the Word. This position must be maintained in opposition to all kinds of Mystics, who lay claim to special revelations and to a spiritual knowledge that is not mediated by the Word, and who thereby lead us into a sea of boundless subjectivity.

- Main purpose:
 - Strengthening of faith
 - Reminder of our mystical union

THE SACRAMENTS as a means of grace

Etymology:

Latin – sacrāmentum

- Latin
 - sacrō ("hallow, consecrate")
 - from sacer ("sacred, holy")
 - Oath of allegiance and also a sacred rite

Cannot be separated from the Word:

Louis Berkhof, *Dogmatics*

The Word of God may never be separated from the sacraments, but must always accompany them, since they are virtually only a visible representation of the truth that is conveyed to us by the Word. In the Church of Rome the Word retires into the background as having only preparatory significance, while the sacraments, considered apart from the Word, are regarded as the real means of grace.

For our constant encouragement:

John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xix.3: 1,278:

But as our faith is slight and feeble unless it be propped on all sides and sustained by every means, it trembles, wavers, totters, and last gives way.

Here our merciful Lord, according to his infinite kindness, so tempers himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and, do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual, he condescends to lead us to himself even by these earthly elements, and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings.

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*:

Because we are not disembodied spirits but sensuous earthly creatures who can only understand spiritual things when they come to us in humanly perceptible forms, God instituted the sacraments in order that by seeing those signs we might gain a better insight into his benefits, receive a stronger confirmation of his promises, and thus be supported and strengthened in our faith.

Examples of signs throughout the Bible:

- Tree of life
- Rainbow
- Circumcision
- Passover
- Throne and the
- Lord's Supper

FUNCTION

What power do they hold?

Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace*

God does not embed grace in the visible signs, nor does He transmit grace thereby into the soul of the one using the sacraments as though through a channel. Not the sacrament, but God Himself communicates grace from His fullness to the one who uses the sacrament according to its instituted purpose.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, 27.3

The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.

Purpose:

1) Accompany the Word

John Calvin, in his *Institutes*, wrote, “a sacrament is never without a preceding promise but is joined to it as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing the promise itself, and of making it more evident to us and in sense ratifying it.”

2) Strengthen Faith

Herman Bavinck, in *Reformed Dogmatics*, wrote, “The sacraments do not work faith but reinforce it, as a wedding ring reinforces love. They do not infuse a physical grace but confer the whole Christ, whom believers already possess by the Word. They bestow on them that same Christ in another way and by another road and so strengthen the faith.”

3) Covenant Reminder (sign and seal)

Bavinck wrote on the sacraments, “...renew the believers’ covenant with God, strengthen them in the communion of Christ, join them more closely to each other, set them apart from the world, and witness to angels and their fellow human beings, showing that they are the people of God, the church of Christ, the communion of the saints.”

The Westminster Confession of Faith, 27.1: “Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.”

WHAT ARE THE TWO SACRAMENTS?

BAPTISM

Just as circumcision did not justify anyone, neither does baptism. It is, as circumcision was, a sign and a seal of the covenant of grace.

What does baptism communicate to the believer?

RC Sproul at Ligonier.com:

The sacrament of baptism signifies that the Lord has done this for His people — He has regenerated our hearts. Water symbolizes the new life the Spirit brings, and its washing effect points to the cleansing from sin that results from faith in Christ.

The Westminster Larger Catechism:

...a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ has ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of engrafting into himself, of remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting

life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.

Verses: Symbol of our Baptism into Christ

Rom. 6:1 ¶ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

Rom. 6:2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Rom. 6:3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Rom. 6:4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Gal. 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

1Cor. 12:12 ¶ For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

1Cor. 12:13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

LORD'S SUPPER

What does the Lord's Table communicate to the believer?

We are incorporated into the body of Christ through baptism, and through the Lord's supper we grow in communion with Christ.

Herman Bavinck, in *Reformed Dogmatics* writes, "In the Lord's supper, Christ comes together with his church, and the church comes together with Christ, thereby testifying to their spiritual communion as displayed in Revelation 3:20: "I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

Bavinck, "It is not merely a reminiscence of or a reflection on Christ's benefits but a most intimate bonding with Christ himself, just as food and drink are united with our body."

Verse: 1Cor. 10:16 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?

Question: Why Bread and Wine?

PRAYER

Acts 2:42 tells us that the saints gathered to commit themselves “to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

- What are the other two means a form of? Dependence.
- What are we admitting in prayer?
- Why are we called to pray?