



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 9.5 – The Doctrine of the Means of Grace

Baptism and the Lord's Supper as Means of Grace

The two functions of the means of grace are to convey the forgiveness of sins won by Christ and to create faith in Christ, which creates the beginning of a new spiritual life. As we study the Bible, we realize that besides the Gospel word, there are also two Gospel ceremonies, baptism and the Lord's Supper, that convey the forgiveness of sins and create or strengthen faith in Christ. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He said it was **"for the remission of sins"** (Matthew 26:28). When the apostle Peter addressed the thousands on Pentecost, he said to them: **"Let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"** (Acts 2:38).

The mistake many Protestant churches make is that they consider baptism and the Lord's Supper to be human acts done in obedience to the Lord's commands. They then say that we do not obtain remission of sin by our own actions, and that, therefore, baptism and the Lord's Supper cannot convey the forgiveness of sins. But baptism and the Lord's Supper are Gospel gifts given to us by which our Lord conveys to us the forgiveness of sins won by Christ. The person who acts in baptism is God Himself, using human agents to carry out His intention of giving us the forgiveness of our sins.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper do not give us a different gift from the gift given to us through the Gospel in word; they give us the same gift, the forgiveness of sins, but in a different way, that is, not only through a word, but also through an activity that is directed to one individual person at a time. These various ways are intended by God to give us even stronger assurance of His gift of forgiveness. This additional assurance strengthens our faith in Christ. In fact, baptism itself is called the Holy Spirit's **"washing of regeneration and renewing"** (Titus 3:5). It is a way by which the Holy Spirit begins His work in us and creates faith in Christ along with a new spiritual life. This is especially beneficial for infants, small children, and others who may not be able to understand the words of the Gospel. The apostle Paul had been an enemy of Christ and a persecutor of Christ's Church. What a spiritual benefit it was for him to hear the words of the Christian named Ananias: **"Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord"** (Acts 22:16)!

Martin Luther wrote: *"The gospel...gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in His grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters"* (Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article IV)

A means of grace is something God does for us, that is, God is conveying and conferring His free gift of forgiveness to us. Prayer, on the other hand, is not God speaking to us and giving us something, but it is the Christian's speaking to God and asking Him for something or praising and thanking Him for a gift already received. For this reason, we should not consider prayer to be a means of grace. When we are concerned about our sins and want to be reassured that we are forgiven, we should take hold of the Gospel of Christ, remember our baptism, and partake of the Lord's Supper **"for the remission of sins."**

Since Jesus was the One who instituted both baptism and the Lord's Supper, they were not means of grace in the Old Testament era before Christ. In the Old Testament, God conveyed forgiveness to His people through the Gospel in prophecy and in type. The law of Moses, given only to the Israelites, was

intended to remind them that they were sinners, to separate the Israelites from other nations, and to keep their sinful nature in check. We can think of circumcision and the Passover celebration as Old Testament means of grace, which have no particular spiritual significance for us today. **“In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation”** (Galatians 6:15). **“Indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us”** (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Questions

1. How do we know that baptism and the Lord’s Supper convey the forgiveness of sins?
2. What can we call baptism and the Lord’s Supper because they convey forgiveness?
3. Why is it important to consider baptism and the Lord’s Supper as Gospel gifts?
4. Since baptism and the Lord’s Supper give us the same forgiveness that is conveyed by the Gospel word, what purpose do they serve?
5. Why should we not consider prayer to be a means of grace?
6. What means of grace did God use in the Old Testament?