

## Part 6 – The Church

### Section 3 The means of grace:

The Word of God - Baptism - the Lord's Supper

#### What are means of Grace?

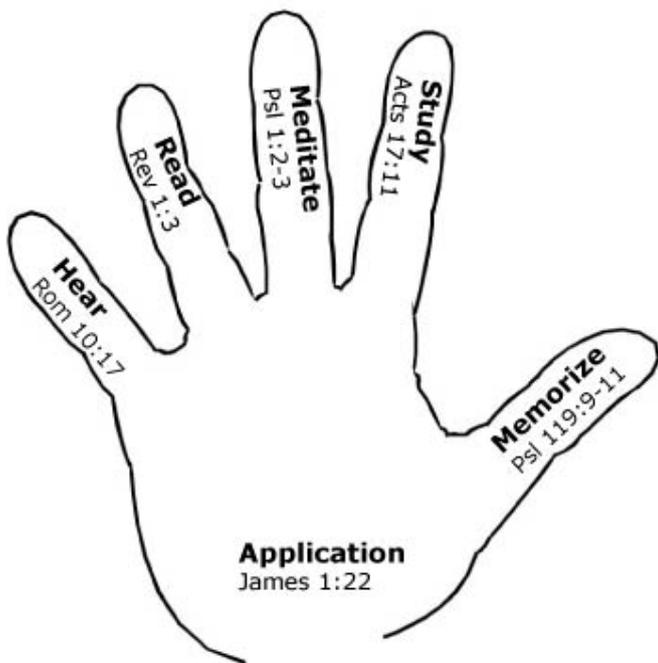
These are defined as the tools God has given to the Church to facilitate new birth, help us identify with Christ and help us to love God and one another, live and grow in the Christian life until we all reach the “unity in the faith” (Eph 4:13).

The two means of grace that are most cited in theology are baptism and communion. However there are many other such as the Word of God, prayer, fasting and works of mercy. Here we will look at the Word of God, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

#### The Word of God

Romans 10:17 says: “..faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” I would not be a Christian if someone had not told me about Jesus Christ (There are some exceptions to this, such as in some Muslim countries where Jesus or an angel appear to people in a dream.) In Luke

8:11 the Word is likened to a seed and once it takes root in a noble and good heart it produces a crop if mixed with faith. The crop is quantified in Matthew and Mark as 30, 60 or 100 times. The Word of God is described in Hebrews 4:12 as “living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”



Jesus said “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The Bible is God's word, and if we want to grow and not live a weak life then hearing or reading the Word of God, like eating food, should be at least a daily habit. There are many ways of doing

this – together in our home, in the congregation, listening online, recording our daily bible reading, etc. We recommend our daily online video scheme to get started in this daily habit. Chatting about the Word together is also an excellent way of getting it rooted in us.

## Baptism

The word “βαπτισμός baptismos” translates “washing” or “submerging”. Whether this has to mean actually going under the water or just sprinkling has been a contentious issue that has stupidly divided the church, especially since the reformation.

However we need to consider the following statements among others: “All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Romans 6:3-4

“...having been buried with him in **baptism**,” Colossians 2:12

It seems from these scriptures that baptism is meant to symbolise death, and therefore submersion would be the most obvious way of doing this.

A second controversy is whether or not infants should be baptised. The Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox and most Anglican churches practice infant baptism. They base this on various Bible verses:



Firstly the Scriptures say “He who believes and is baptised shall be saved, and he that disbelieves shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16) So infant baptism is often motivated by the fear that as a child is born with original sin then if it is not baptised it will be condemned to everlasting punishment. But this scripture and others point to disbelief rather than the lack of baptism. The thief on the cross was in paradise the day he believed and had no means to be baptised. However we can say that if someone

knows they should be baptised and refuses, this casts doubt on their faith in the first place. In the case of persecution if someone decides to be baptised and is likely to be killed, imprisoned or ostracised if they are, we need to be patient and prayerful with the person concerned.

A second scripture that is used to justify infant baptism is that the Philippian jailer was baptised “and all his household (Acts 16:33). It is assumed that the household would have contained infants. Thirdly the saying of Jesus in Mark 10:14, “let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” implies that children can be baptised.

However there are many more verses that connect baptism with adults believing (eg Acts 2:38-41, 8:12, 10:47,48, Gal 3:27, etc.) and certainly the weight of scripture points in this direction. We must realise though that there is nothing to say that children shouldn't be baptised, and disputes over this and other issues should never be used to divide the church of God.

In reality however, baptism of infants as an insurance policy is misguided as it's faith and obedience that counts, and no baptism without faith will count for anything (see John the Baptist in Luke 3:7-8: “John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” Effectively he turned away those who wanted to be baptised without first believing and repenting. So we can also say that if someone has been baptised as an infant, without any understanding, then they should be baptised again when they truly believe (Phillip said in Acts 8:37: ““If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”)

## **The Lord's Supper**

Taking the bread and wine was instituted by Jesus to do “in remembrance of” Him (Lk 22:19). His body was broken for us, and His blood sealed the new covenant of grace whereby by believing in Him our sins are forgiven and we go to paradise. It was never suggested in the New Testament that taking the bread and the wine should be anything else, but many denominations over the years have proclaimed that something special happens during communion. It should simply be an act declaring our faith

in Him and our unity with one another. The danger in believing that it is more than this can encourage unbelievers to use it as an “insurance policy” whereby they take the bread and wine but live as they please. Having said this, it is good to use our faith when taking communion, being prayerful and meditative giving thanks for such a great outpouring of love and grace on the cross.



### **Conclusion – doing things in reality**

There is a great difference between real faith and just superstition or doing things as an insurance policy. A vast number of people take the latter road, thinking that being baptised or taking communion has value in itself. John the Baptist in Luke 3:7 was very strongly against the Pharisees who came to be baptised because they thought it would please the crowd, or because they saw it as an insurance policy. He called them a “brood of vipers”. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:28-31 warns us not to take the bread and wine unless we have a clear conscience.

So we need to make it clear that while it is a command to be baptised and to take the bread and wine, doing so will not have any effect on us unless it is accompanied with belief and sincerity.

So these three means of grace: the Word of God, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are given to the Church that we might grow into the pure Bride of Jesus Christ, “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph 5:27). We are “predestined to the image of His Son, the He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rom 8:29) to the praise of His glorious grace which He has freely given us” Eph 1:6. Hallelujah and amen!

**Songs:** I have decided to follow Jesus; Thank you for the cross, Lord.

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