

B.A.S.I.C.

Brothers And Sisters In Christ

The Augsburg Confession: Means of Grace

By Pastor Nathanael Mayhew

The Means of Grace

True Lutherans are unique on their understanding of the Means of Grace. No other branch of Christianity attributes to the Gospel the efficacy and power which Luther and his followers did, and still do. It is said that Martin Luther gave too much importance to the Means of Grace, continuing in the example of the Church in Rome. But as we will see, Luther taught the power of the Word not because of the influence of Romanism, but because Scripture itself teaches that the Means of Grace are all-important in our salvation.

In the Apology, the Lutheran response to the Roman Confutation, the articles on Justification ([Article IV](#)), the Means of Grace (Article V) and New Obedience ([Article VI](#)) are combined. The fact that the reformers combined these three articles into one shows that the subject matter of these articles are closely connected.

But what is the connection between Justification and the Means of Grace?

The Gospel in Word and Sacrament is the means God has given through which we receive His grace (Means - of - Grace). Without it, we would not be able to receive God's justification. The Apology makes the connection between the two saying: *"One cannot deal with God or grasp Him except through the Word. Therefore, justification takes place through the Word as Paul says..."*.

The Augsburg Confession

The Lutheran confessors agreed with Luther on the doctrine of the Means of Grace. In Article V they confessed that the Holy Spirit works only through the means of the Gospel, and condemned those who taught otherwise (notice how this article is based on the previous one): *To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a*

gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this. Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel."

Scripture on the Means of Grace

What is most important for us is what God has told us about the power of the Gospel in His revealed Word. The reformers taught that God provided the Gospel and the Sacraments through which He gives the Holy Spirit, and without which the Holy Spirit does not come.

First, Scripture tells us that the Gospel is powerful:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16) and "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12).

This powerful message of the Gospel was given to us "earthen vessels" that God's salvation might be known and His blessing of salvation received:

Jesus told His disciples, ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).***

During His High Priestly prayer on Maundy Thursday evening Jesus said, ***"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:18-21).***

The apostle Paul wrote ***"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).***

This powerful Word which has been given by God to us is the only means through which God has promised to work faith through the Holy Spirit:

Peter wrote: ***"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23).***

The Bible clearly describes the divine and human natures of Christ.

Paul told the Romans ***“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17)*** and wrote to the Ephesians that the mystery of Christ ***“has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:5-6)***.

Note: The story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus also speaks of how God works only through the Gospel - see Luke 16:29.

Nowhere does God promise to work faith in our hearts outside of the means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. The Gospel is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to create faith in the sinner’s heart and bring the saving work of Christ to mankind. Apart from the Gospel there can be no salvation. Paul makes this connection clear when he writes:

“For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tid-

ings of good things!” (Romans 10:13-15).

Errors concerning the Means of Grace

There are two pitfalls concerning the Means of Grace. According to Zwingli and Calvin, the means of Grace are not necessary for salvation. Zwingli said: “The Holy Spirit requires no wagon for His divine operations.”

Calvin taught the same. Because he denied universal justification, he denied that there was a means of grace for the non-elect. But Calvin also denied the power of the Gospel on the elect because He taught believers to seek the special call or inward illumination by the Holy Spirit apart from the Gospel: “The truth attends the work of regeneration, but is not the means by which it is effected” (Charles Hodge).

This is the way the Reformed churches still view the Means of Grace today. As a result the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are also stripped of their power and become no more than signs or symbols of God’s grace.

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic church, though it denies the particular grace of Calvin, also denies the power of the Gospel. Catholicism

teaches that Christ has secured so much grace for us sinners, that with God’s assistance they can earn salva-

***The work of Christ
can also be divided
into two parts:
His humiliation and
His exaltation.***

tion for themselves. According to Roman Catholicism, God infuses grace into the heart of the sinner so that he can merit justification and salvation before God.

In Roman Catholicism people are taught that the means of grace are not the means through which God offers and brings about faith in Christ, but the means through which the sinner is infused with God's grace and put into a position to earn salvation by his own works. As a result of this Roman teaching the number of the sacraments was enlarged (beyond those which truly

offer forgiveness of sins) so that the sinner may by many sacraments earn salvation. So the sinner is turned away from the Word to their own works for salvation.

Conclusion

The perversion of the doctrine of the Means of Grace will ultimately lead to a perversion of the doctrine of justification. Maintaining the true doctrine of the Means of Grace is of utmost importance to preserve the true Christian faith. Without it, we cannot be saved; through it, we are brought to faith and receive God's grace in Christ!

Ambur Pastors

By Pastor Emeritus David Koenig

From the Field August 14, '15

There are fourteen men preaching in this district. In eight of the villages they serve there is no other Christian church. This is important in our considerations as we want to be like Paul preaching where Christ is not known. Half of the men came out of another Lutheran church body in India. And with this we have a leg up on their background in teachings. The men serve 457 souls. The highest attendance in a VBS was 60. The oldest pastor is 58 and the longest a man has

been preaching is 30 years while the shortest is four years. Several of the men were Hindu converts. Arul Das who is 43 became a Christian 18 years ago and has been preaching for the last seven years. Before that he worked in a shoe factory. Ramesh Timothy serves in a village with no other Christian church and in seven surrounding villages there is also no Christian church.

There is contact between these men and others nearby. Ambur is not far from Vellore. We held an informa-

tional meeting at Vellore for 27 different preachers. We studied: What is a Lutheran?, Baptism, Communion, The Position of Women in the Church. In addition to giving copies of these in Tamil, we handed out also in their language studies on Close Communion and Being an Evangelist.

I love to give a hand full of candies to pastors' children as we visit. And there are the opportunities to give out to other children we meet as we walk to the pastor's house. This is a good reminder that Christ died for all, just as candy is also given indiscriminately. It is a true joy to be out among the brothers and sisters and see and hear and learn and pray.
