

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MEANS OF GRACE

The spiritual blessings spoken of in the Creed and asked for in the Lord's Prayer are brought to us through the Means of Grace.

WHAT THEY ARE. The Means of Grace are: 1. The Word of God; 2. The Sacrament of Holy Baptism; 3. The Sacrament of the Altar. They are called the means of grace, because they are the means or vehicles through which God's grace comes to us. It is through the Word of God and the Sacraments that the Holy Spirit does His work in us.

THE WORD OF GOD

THE CHIEF MEANS OF GRACE is the Word of God.¹ For through it the Holy Spirit “calls, enlightens, sanctifies, and preserves us in the true faith.” Even in the Sacraments, the principal thing is the Word of God with its command and promise; and without the Word of God there would be no sacrament.

ITS POWER. The Holy Spirit is always in the Word, and gives it saving power. Through the Law and the Gospel which the Word contains, He brings to repentance and faith all those persons who do not wilfully resist His grace.² Through it He not only tells us what to do, but gives us the power to obey.³ Because He is in the Word, “it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”⁴ (Compare what is said concerning the Bible in Chapter I., and concerning the Work of the Holy Spirit in Chapter XX.)

THE SACRAMENTS

WHAT A SACRAMENT IS. A Sacrament is a holy ordinance, instituted by Christ, in which invisible heavenly gifts are bestowed upon us through the use of visible earthly elements.

HOW MANY THERE ARE. In the sense in which we use the word “Sacrament” there are only two holy ordinances to which the name may be applied; namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. For these are the only two which possess the three essentials of a sacrament: 1. The Command of Christ; 2. The Use of Earthly Elements; 3. The Communication of a Heavenly Gift.*

OLD TESTAMENT TYPES. The rite of Circumcision, practised in Old Testament times, was a type of Baptism; and the Passover was a type of the Lord's Supper.

1 I Pet. 1:23.

2 Heb. 4:12.

3 Eph. 2:4,5.

4 Rom. 1:16.

* The Roman Catholic Church teaches that there are seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, the Lord's Supper, Ordination, Marriage, and Extreme Unction. But five of these lack one or more of the essentials of a sacrament enumerated above.

THEIR PURPOSE. The sacraments have been given to us in order that they might bring a special comfort to our souls, in addition to the comfort which we find in God's Word. For the Grace of God which is offered to all men in the Word, is brought and sealed to each believer *individually* in the sacraments. My baptism assures me that all the blessings of Christ's redemption are meant for *me*: and the Lord's Supper assures me that Christ's body and blood were given and shed for *me* for the remission of *my* sins.

FAITH NECESSARY. Without faith, no one can obtain any benefit from the sacraments. But he who believes receives the heavenly gifts offered in them, and has the blessed assurance that he is a child of God and an heir of heaven.

QUESTIONS.--1. How are the spiritual blessings spoken of in the Creed and asked for in the Lord's Prayer brought to us? 2. What are the Means of Grace? 3. Why are they so called? 4. What is the chief Means of Grace? 5. Why does the Word of God possess saving power? 6. What is a sacrament? 7. How many sacraments are there? 8. What are the three essentials of a sacrament? 9. What is the purpose of the sacraments? 10. Does every one who receives the sacraments derive a benefit from them?

SCRIPTURE READING.--The Man Born Blind, John 9:1-7.

PART IV
THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM
CHAPTER XXXIV

I. *What is Baptism?*

Baptism is not simply water, but it is the water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word.

What is that Word of God?

It is that which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke, as it is recorded in the last chapter of Matthew, verse 19: "Go ye, and teach (make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

WHAT BAPTISM IS

BAPTISM CONSISTS in applying water to a person "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," as Christ has commanded.¹

Baptism is not simply Water. In one sense, indeed, the water used in baptism is simply ordinary water from well, cistern, or stream;² but when used in baptism it ceases to be simply water, and possesses special value and power, because

It is the Water Comprehended in God's Command. The water of baptism is a water which God has commanded us to use,--His command being, "Go ye and make disciples of all nations, baptizing then," etc.

And Connected with God's Word. In baptism, water is applied "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"; and thus it is used in connection with the very words of Christ Himself. The water and the Word together make the sacrament.

ITS NECESSITY. Baptism is necessary for all, because Christ has commanded that all should be baptized, and has connected the blessing of salvation with this sacrament.³ Those who despise it and refuse to be baptized, cannot be saved. But if any person should desire baptism and be unable to obtain it, he would not on that account be lost. It is not the lack of baptism, but the despising of baptism that condemns. Baptism is to be administered by the pastor. But if there should be extreme peril of death before a minister could possibly arrive, any member of the Church may baptize. Such lay-baptism, however, should afterwards be announced in church, and be declared valid.

1 Matt. 28:19.

2 Acts 8:36.

3 Mark 16:16.

WHO ARE TO BE BAPTIZED

The command of Christ to “make disciples” includes “all nations.” All those persons, therefore, who are willing to become disciples are to be baptized; namely, adults who have received the proper religious instruction and profess faith in Christ, and children whom competent sponsors present for baptism.

INFANT BAPTISM. Infants should be baptized at a very early age, and thus be received into God's covenant as His children. Since they cannot be instructed before baptism, they should be carefully instructed afterwards⁴ and be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,⁵ so that they may always remain faithful and obedient children of God.

SPONSORS answer the questions for the child at its baptism, and promise to see to it that the child is properly instructed and trained in the Christian religion. Sponsors must themselves be members in good standing in the Church.

WHY CHILDREN SHOULD BE BAPTIZED.* As children were received into the Old Testament covenant by the rite of circumcision, which was a type of baptism, so God desires that they shall be received into the New Testament covenant by baptism. Some of the reasons for infant baptism are the following:-- 1. Children form part of the “nations” whom Christ commanded His disciples to baptize. 2. They are by nature sinful and need God's grace as well as adults.⁶ While they have not yet committed any *conscious* transgressions, they have inherited a sinful heart, and the germs of sin in them will soon grow into actual transgressions. 3. Christ has commanded that little children should be brought to Him, and we obey this command by baptizing them and teaching them.⁷ 4. Christ says of children, “Of such is the kingdom of God”;⁸ and they have a right, therefore, to receive that sacrament by which we enter God's kingdom. 5. The promise of God's grace is given to children as well as to adults.⁹ 6. Children have capacity for faith.¹⁰ 7. The apostles baptized whole families.¹¹

4 Matt. 28:20.

5 Eph. 6:4.

* Baptists sometimes argue against infant baptism on the basis of the Scripture passage: “Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them,” etc., claiming that Christ mentions baptizing before teaching in this passage. For in its correct translation, as given in the Revised Version of the English Bible, it reads, “Go ye therefore, and *make disciples* of all the nations, *baptizing* them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; *teaching* them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.” If the order in which the two words “baptize” and “teach” occur in this passage proved anything with respect to the baptism of infants, it would prove that they *should* be baptized. For in the case of children, baptizing comes first and teaching follows, just as in the passage quoted.

6 John 3:5,6.† Job 14:4.

7 Luke 18:16.

8 Mark 10:14,15.†

9 Acts 2:39.

10 Matt. 18:6.

11 Acts 16:33.

HOW BAPTISM IS TO BE ADMINISTERED

In His command to baptize, Christ does not specify any mode of baptism. It may be performed in any one of the three ways; namely, by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. One mode of baptism is just as valid as the others. The most convenient mode, the one best adapted to all circumstances, and the one most widely used in the Christian Church, is by pouring or sprinkling. Immersion is not advisable in our climate, and in many cases, such as severe sickness, it could not possibly be employed.

IMMERSION NOT ESSENTIAL. The word “baptize” does not necessarily mean to immerse, as the Baptists claim. When the Saviour instituted this sacrament, He did not coin a new word, but employed one already in use. The original Greek word from which our English word “baptize” is derived, is used in the New Testament in the sense of washing¹² and sprinkling.¹³ The baptism of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost¹⁴ and of the Philippian jailor¹⁵ could hardly have been by immersion, on account of the scarcity of water available for such a purpose. When Jesus was baptized, He “came up out of the water”;¹⁶ but it is quite probable that He stood in the stream while John poured water on His head.

THE ESSENCE OF BAPTISM consists in applying water “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost”; and its gracious effect depends, not on the amount of water that is used, but on the Word of God with which the water is connected.

QUESTIONS.--1. What does baptism consist in? 2. Why is baptism not simply water? 3. What is meant by “water comprehended in God's command”? 4. What is meant by “water connected with God's Word”? 5. What is to be said about the necessity of baptism? 6. Who are to be baptized? 7. What is to be said about infant baptism? 8. Who may be sponsors, and what is their duty? 9. Give some reasons for infant baptism. 10. What is to be said about the mode of baptism? 11. Why is immersion not essential? 12. In what does the essence of baptism consist?

SCRIPTURE VERSES.--John 3:5, 6. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Mark 10:14,15. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

READING.--The Baptism of Jesus, Matt. 3:13-17.

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12 Mark 7:4.

13 I Cor. 10:2.

14 Acts 2:41.

15 Acts 16:33.

16 Matt. 3:16.

CHAPTER XXXV

II. *What gifts or benefits does Baptism confer?*

It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and confers everlasting salvation on all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare.

What are such words and promises of God?

Those which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke, as they are recorded in the last chapter of Mark, verse 16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

THE BENEFITS OF BAPTISM

Baptism is God's means of receiving us into His covenant, and opening up to us all the treasures of Christ's redemption. Through this sacrament He adopts us as His children and receives us into membership in His Church.¹ We are baptized in (into) the name of the Father (who sent His Son to save us), and of the Son (who died to redeem us), and of the Holy Ghost (who applies Christ's redemption to our souls). Therefore every baptized person may say, “God is *my* Father, Christ is *my* Redeemer, the Holy Ghost is *my* Sanctifier, and all the benefits of Christ's redemption are offered to *me*.” Hence we declare of baptism, that

It works Forgiveness of Sins,² delivers from Death and the Devil, and confers Everlasting Salvation. These are the very benefits which Christ has acquired for me by His innocent sufferings and death (see Article II of the Creed, Chapter XIX). And since I have been “baptized into Christ's death,”³ all these benefits belong to me if I only accept them by faith.⁴ I am regarded by God as having already suffered the full penalty of my sins in Christ's death, and for His sake I am pardoned and saved.

On all who Believe. Faith is the hand with which we grasp and hold fast the treasures of God's grace offered in this sacrament. The benefits are offered to every one who is baptized, but they are accepted and possessed only by him who believes.

As the Word and Promise of God declare. The benefits belong to all who are baptized and believe, because God has said so.⁵ He has promised, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

WITHOUT FAITH baptism will not save any one. “He that believeth not shall be damned” even though he is baptized. For while such a person has been adopted as God's child, he is a disobedient and rebellious child, and therefore is disinherited, and loses the

1 Gal. 3:26,27.†

2 Acts 2:38.† Acts 22:16. Eph. 5:25,26.

3 Rom. 6:3.†

4 Mark 16:16.

5 Numb. 23:19.†

heavenly inheritance⁶ which would have been his, if he had remained faithful.

BAPTISM PERMANENT. Baptism, once properly administered, is not to be repeated. It is a permanent covenant between God and us. While men are often unfaithful to their covenant, God never is.⁷ He bestows the blessings of baptism on all who comply with its conditions. Having received us by baptism as His children, He ever afterwards remains our loving heavenly Father, to whom we may turn with fullest confidence. And if any who have fallen from grace repent and seek His mercy, they find Him standing with open arms to receive them.⁸ Such persons need not be re-baptized; their old baptism stands. A rebellious son who repents needs not to be re-adopted, but needs only to be forgiven.

III. *How can water produce such great effects?*

It is not the water, indeed, that produces these effects, but the Word of God which accompanies and is connected with the water, and our faith which relies on the Word of God connected with the water. For the water without the Word of God is simply water, and no baptism. But when connected with the Word of God, it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost; as St. Paul says to Titus in the third chapter, verses 5-8: “According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying.”

WHY BAPTISM HAS POWER TO CONFER SUCH BENEFITS

It is not the Water, indeed, that produces these Effects. Water alone cannot wash away sins. Yet the water of baptism is necessary, because Christ has commanded its use, and has connected the promise of salvation with it.

But the Word of God which accompanies and is connected with the Water. It is the Word of God, with its command and promise, that makes baptism a sacrament, and gives it power to confer such great benefits.⁹

And our Faith which relies on the Word of God connected with the Water.* The baptism is a real baptism and offers these great benefits, whether we believe or not. But the benefits become ours, only when we believe the promises of God.¹⁰

It is a gracious Water of Life, because the Word and promise of God, which are connected with it, give it power to bestow life and salvation on all who believe.

6 I Pet. 1:4.

7 Rom. 3:3.

8 Luke 15:11-24.

9 John 6:63.

* The story of Naaman the leper (II Kings 5:8-14) illustrates how water, the Word of God, and faith can produce such great effects. It was not the water of the Jordan that cured Naaman; yet he could not have been cured without the water, because the promise of healing was connected with its use. When he *believed* the *Word* of promise and used the *water* as he was commanded, he was healed. So the water, the Word, and our faith, which trusts in the Word, cleanse us from the leprosy of sin.

10 Mark 16:16.

And a “Washing of Regeneration” in the Holy Ghost, because it is the means through which the Holy Ghost causes us to be "born again," as God's children.

QUESTIONS.--1. What does God do for us through baptism? 2. What may every baptized person say? 3. What benefits does baptism confer? 4. Who has acquired these benefits for you, and how? 5. Why do they become yours through baptism? 6. What has faith to do with the reception of these benefits? 7. How do we know that baptism confers all these benefits on all who believe? 8. What is to be said about those who are baptized but do not believe? 9. What is to be said about the permanence of baptism? 10. Why has baptism power to confer such great benefits? 11. Why is it a “gracious water of life,” and a “washing of regeneration”?

SCRIPTURE VERSES.--Gal. 3:26, 27. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.

Acts 2:38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

READING.--Naaman, II King 5:1-14.

Rom. 6:3. Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Numb. 23:19. God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

CHAPTER XXXVI

IV. *What does such baptizing with water signify?*

It signifies that the old Adam in us is to be drowned and destroyed by daily sorrow and repentance, together with all sins and evil lusts; and that again the new man should daily come forth and rise, that shall live in the presence of God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is it so written?

St Paul, in the epistle to the Romans, chapter 6, verse 4, says: “We are buried with Christ by baptism into death; that like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

THE DUTY WHICH BAPTISM IMPOSES

Baptism bestows upon us the great privilege of being children of God; but it also imposes upon us the duty to live and act as God's children. Every one who is baptized promises, either with his own lips or through his sponsors, that he will live thus. God is always faithful to His part of the baptismal covenant; we should always be faithful to ours. Our duty is two-fold:--

1. **The Old Adam in us is to be drowned and destroyed by Daily Sorrow and Repentance, together with all Sins and Evil Lusts.** By the “old Adam in us” is meant our old sinful self, as we are by nature. For we are born into the world with a sinful heart and a natural inclination to evil. This evil nature still clings to us even after we have been “born again” into sonship with God.¹ This old sinful self, together with the sins and lusts to which it prompts us, must be suppressed, subdued, and gradually destroyed.² We should gain the mastery over it more and more every day. We shall do this, if we daily mourn over our sinfulness, and ask God for Christ's sake to grant us forgiveness and strength.

2. **The New Man should daily come forth and rise, that shall live in the Presence of God in Righteousness and Purity forever.** By the “new man” is meant our new self,--what we have become by the work of the Holy Spirit in us. For if we have been baptized and believe, there has been implanted in us a new life. We have become new creatures,³ who by God's grace hate sin and desire from the heart to do God's will alone. As the old man in us should daily become weaker and gradually die, so the new man in us should daily grow stronger,⁴ and cause us to live in constantly increasing righteousness and purity here on earth,⁵ till at last we are received into God's presence for Jesus' sake, and live before Him in perfect righteousness and purity forever.

1 Rom. 7:18-24.

2 Eph. 4:22.† Gal. 5:24.†

3 II Cor. 5:17.

4 Eph. 4:23,24.† II Pet. 3:18.

5 Phil. 3:12.†

CONFIRMATION

The rite of confirmation is closely connected with the baptism of children. For the children who have been baptized are afterwards to be taught “to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded”;⁶ and, when they have reached an age at which they are able to examine themselves, they should be confirmed.

PRECEDED BY INSTRUCTION. Confirmation is to be preceded by thorough instruction in the doctrines and duties of the Christian religion. In addition to the instruction received in the home and the Sunday-school, those who desire to be confirmed are specially instructed in the catechetical class by the pastor. Confirmation is the Church's testimony that the catechumens have received the necessary instruction to fit them for intelligent and earnest participation in the full privileges of Church membership. This instruction is the principal thing, and without it confirmation would lose its meaning.

WHAT CONFIRMATION IS. In confirmation the catechumen makes no new promises, but repeats with his own lips the confession of faith and the promise of faithfulness to Christ which were made for him by his sponsor at his baptism. Thereupon the minister lays his hand upon the head of each catechumen, and the minister and congregation pray that God would give to each His Holy Spirit to keep him in the faith and to cause him to grow in holiness.

WHY WE CONFIRM. Confirmation is not commanded in the Scriptures, but is a useful ordinance of the Church. It does not make us members of the Church; for we become members by baptism; but it admits us to *communicant* membership in the Church. Those who have been confirmed are admitted to the Lord's Supper. They are also entitled to act as sponsors at the baptism of children. The right to vote depends upon the constitution of the particular congregation.

QUESTIONS.--1. What duty does baptism impose? 2. In what two-fold way is this duty to be performed? 3. What is meant by “the old Adam in us”? 4. What shall be done with our old sinful self? 5. How shall we succeed in gaining the mastery over it? 6. What is meant by the “new man”? 7. What does our new self prompt us to do? 8. What should the new man in us do? 9. What is to be done with children who have been baptized? 10. By what is confirmation to be preceded? 11. What is to be said about the importance of this instruction? 12. Tell what confirmation is? 13. Why do we confirm? 14. What privileges does confirmation confer?

SCRIPTURE VERSES.--Eph. 4: 22. That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.

Eph. 4:24. And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Gal. 5:24. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

Phil. 3:12. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

READING.--The Lame Man of Bethesda, John 5:1-14.

6 Matt. 28:20.