

# MEANS OF GRACE IN THE CHURCH

## INTRODUCTION

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- God's grace comes to believers through salvation...and this salvation gives us access to all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph 1:3)
- This grace continues to come to us through the individual practice of the spiritual disciplines (personal prayer, personal time in the Word, personal confession, etc.)
- But God also intends for the church to be a means of sanctification and growth in the lives of believers
- Many today, however, fail to appreciate the means of grace God has given in the church
- We live in an age of "churchless Christians"
- Many simply say they don't need to go to church thinking that what they get from the radio and the Internet is an adequate substitute for attending church
- Others may attend church, but are not fully engaged and immersed in the life of a church
- This is one of the saddest trends today: Christians thinking the church is not necessary for their spiritual growth
- When a Christian does this, they cut themselves off from one of the most fundamental means that the Holy Spirit uses to bring blessing to his people
- Cultivating a love for the local church begins by understanding that it is one of the primary means God to make us holy and conform us to Christ
- Wayne Grudem: "We may define the means of grace as follows: The means of grace are activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to Christians" (page 950)

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN THE CHURCH

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**Ephesians 4:11-16** ~ And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

- Notice in vs. 12 what is to take place in the church...pastors and teachers are given to the church...to train others to do the work of the ministry...so the body of Christ is built up!

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The church is to be a spiritual greenhouse...the Miracle Grow in a believer's life</li> </ul> |
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- Notice vs. 13 ~ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ
- The church is a place where believers grow in deep knowledge of Christ
- The end product of this knowledge is believers manifesting the qualities of Christ and being conformed to His image
- Notice vs. 14 ~ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

- That talks about growth in spiritual discernment
- Notice vs. 15 ~ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ
- That's talking about spiritual growth and maturity...become more and more like Christ
- That only happens in the context of the church...it can't happen privately, independently, in isolation
- Notice vs. 16 ~ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love
- Notice how the whole body grows together...it grows when every person does their part...when each part is working properly
- Every believer using their spiritual gift in the community of believers has a corporate sanctifying effect
- The Word...the Spirit...the gifts all brought to bear upon the life of the body that promote corporate and community spiritual growth
- "working" = *energeia* = energy....there is power in the body of Christ to cause growth and maturity!
- So God has designed that spiritual growth take place in the body of Christ!
- So if a believer is not involved, active, serving, engaged in meaningful relationships in the church, they will be stunted in their spiritual growth
- Spiritual growth does not take place in isolation
- Isolation from the Church is Dangerous.....it is spiritual suicide
- Lions and tigers and other predatory animals go after the wounded, the sick, and those isolated from others
- Isolation is a serious threat to a believer's spiritual growth...it is one of those sins that can go undetected for a while, and before long, there is a sudden coldness and an unhealthy wall built up between an individual and their church family
- Isolation is the devil's oldest trick in his black book of sinful temptations
- It is dangerous for many reasons: it creates distance from the church body...it kills community...it makes believer's vulnerable to Satan's attacks...it opens one up for influence from the world, the flesh, and the devil...it creates a rogue attitude of independence that's misguided and deceptively false...it prevents accountability...it creates loneliness and intensifies the burdens of life
- It is sad when Christians live their lives behind tall privacy fences beyond the gaze and interaction of any outside influence
- We must learn to see the church as a blessing from God rather than an inconvenience
- We must never look at the church as a violation of our spiritual privacy fence because we were never called to walk the journey of the Christian life alone

## THE MEANS TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN THE CHURCH

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### Preaching the Word

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#### *It Brings Salvation*

**Romans 1:16** ~ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

**Romans 10:17** ~ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

**James 1:18** ~ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

**1 Peter 1:23** ~ for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God

- Man apart from Christ is in a desperate condition
- Therefore, they must hear about the transforming power of Christ through the preaching of His Word
- Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “The moment you consider man’s real need, and also the nature of the salvation announced and proclaimed in the Scriptures, you are driven to the conclusion that the primary task of the Church is to preach and to proclaim this, to show man’s real need, and to show the only remedy, the only cure for it.”

### *It Causes Sanctification*

**Psalms 19:7-8** ~ The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

**Psalms 119:105** ~ Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

**Isaiah 55:10-11** ~ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.

**Matthew 4:4** ~ But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’ ”

**Ephesians 4:11-16** ~ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

**2 Timothy 3:16** ~ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

**Hebrews 4:12** ~ For the word of God is 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.

- Like a scalpel in the hands of a skilled surgeon, the Word of God, when faithfully preached, excises diseased areas of life and fosters spiritual strength and health
- No other tool in the preacher’s toolbox possesses the same power to sanctify as the preached Word

### *It Incites Worship*

**Nehemiah 8:5-6** ~ Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

- Genuine worship springs from the well of biblical preaching
- Faithful, powerful, consistent preaching of the Word of God constitutes the source for the fountain of worship that should cascade from the hearts of God’s people and flow from the church
- It is biblical preaching that initiates and sustains this attitude of wonder, love, and praise directed toward God in an attitude of humble worship and exaltation

- Hughes Oliphant Old describes this relationship between preaching and worship: “The preaching and the hearing of the Word of God is in the last analysis worship, worship in its most profound sense. Preaching is not an auxiliary activity to worship, nor is it some kind of preparation for worship which one hopes will follow...the proclaiming of the Word of God, simply in itself, is high service to God. The reading and preaching of Scripture is worship of an even greater intensity, an even greater depth, and an even greater magnificence than were ever the sacrifices of the Temple.”<sup>1</sup>
- Old describes the ends to which preaching aims when he writes, “When preaching unfolds the eternal counsels of God’s will and the glorious destiny he has appointed for his creation, God is worshipped. Even more, when preaching becomes a means of bringing about these purposes, then it is doxological. It serves the glory of God.”<sup>2</sup>
- Biblical preaching possesses theological significance in that it constitutes and promotes true worship, which is the aim of the church and the heart of every believer
- For this reason, preaching is not a means to an end; it is an end in itself since it serves to elevate the glory and majesty of God through the proclamation of His authoritative and sufficient Word
- This is important because there is a crisis in preaching today!!
- We must understand the value of preaching in the life of the body and not compromise!!

## Baptism

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**Matthew 28:19-20** ~ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

**Acts 2:38** ~ Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 6:3-5** ~ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,

- Though we do not hold that baptism conveys the same grace as the Catholics teach, we must recognize the blessings that come to an individual who is obedient to baptism
- And that blessing spills over to the church as well as they hear testimonies of those who have been saved and witness their steps of obedience in the waters of baptism

## Communion

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**John 6:55-56** ~ For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

**1 Corinthians 10:16** ~ Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?

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

- Again, though we do not hold that the Lord’s Supper conveys the same grace as the Catholics teach, we must recognize the blessings that come to an individual who participates in the Lord’s supper

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 189.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 212.

- When we participate in communion, we have the privilege of remembering Christ's death as our sacrifice...in doing so, it has a sanctifying effect upon our lives: we confess sin, we consider Christ, we worship!
- This blessing also spills over to the church as we corporately participate in this fellowship with Christ, corporately remember his death, and corporately proclaim his return
- The unity of believers is particularly on display in the Lord's table

## Prayer

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**Acts 4:31** ~ And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

**Ephesians 6:18-19** ~ With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

**Philippians 4:6-7** ~ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Hebrews 4:16** ~ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**James 5:16** ~ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

- Corporate prayer when the church is gathered and prayer for one another in the body of Christ are powerful means by which the Lord bring blessings upon Christians within the church
- Lloyd Jones reminds us of the sanctifying power of prayer: "Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God. It is the highest activity of the human soul, and therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man's true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life...Ultimately, therefore, a man discovers the real condition of his spiritual life when he examines himself in private, when he is alone with God."<sup>3</sup>
- Prayer is the means by which we harness ourselves to God's mighty power; therefore, great blessings come to those who pray

## Worship

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**2 Chronicles 5:13-14** ~ when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD saying, "He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God

**John 4:24** ~ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

**James 4:8** ~ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- Since worship is what we were created for, it becomes one of the primary means by which God sanctifies us and makes us holy
- Worshipping the Lord corporately has a humbling effect on us and causes us to respond rightly to God
- It is through genuine congregational worship that God brings His people great blessings

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<sup>3</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2:45

## Church Discipline

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**1 Corinthians 5:6-8** ~ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

**1 Timothy 5:20** ~ Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.

- Practicing church discipline has a sanctifying effect on the entire body
- Not only does it keep the bride of Christ pure, it also has a way of demonstrating God's heart toward sin and His earnest desire that we live holy lives

## Giving

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**Luke 6:38** ~ Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

**2 Corinthians 9:6-11** ~ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, “He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.” Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

- If giving is done from a joyful, cheerful, sacrificial heart and as an act of worship, it brings great blessing upon the individual and the body corporately
- Seen this way, giving unto the Lord is not to be seen as an unwelcome obligation but rather as a means by which God works through His body for our good and His glory

## Fellowship

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**Acts 2:42** ~ They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

**Acts 2:44-45** ~ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

**Acts 4:32-34** ~ And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales

**Hebrews 10:24-25** ~ consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together

- Believers need each other to grow in holiness
- The numerous “one-anothers” in the New Testament testify to the great blessing which comes from being part of the body
- The fact that Paul refers to the church as a “body” (1 Cor 12) demonstrates that blessing that comes to fellow believers when they engage in mutually sanctifying relationships within the body of Christ