

The Means of Grace

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Taught at Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Florida
December 27, 2006

This evening, as we prepare to pray together, I want to speak briefly on what we often call “the means of grace.” These are provisions and helps that God has given us to take and use for the good of our souls and for the good of others.

In Philippians 2:12–13 Paul tells us:

Philippians 2:12–13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

God has given us a responsibility to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We are to obey His Word. We are to live according to His promises and act according to His will. But He does not leave us to our own strength and our own devices as we seek to live in obedience to His Word. We are to pursue obedience, knowing that it is God who is at work in us, giving us both the desire and the power to do His will.

God has made us alive in Christ. He has brought us out of darkness and blindness, and called us to walk as children of light—to walk in the light of His Word as faithful followers of Christ. In Ephesians 5 we read:

Ephesians 5:15–16 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

We are to walk circumspectly—the ESV says: “Look carefully then how you walk.” We are to keep watch over our conduct, shining the light of God’s Word on our lives from every angle. We are to redeem the time and walk as wise, not as fools—that is we are to conduct our lives knowing that there is a God and that His promises are true and everything He has said will certainly come to pass.

One of the most important responsibilities we have, as we redeem the time and walk in the light of God’s Word, is the **care and nurture of our own soul**. To carry out this responsibility God has graciously and abundantly provided every means necessary for our success and wellbeing.

God has given us “means of grace” by which we can care and nurture our souls in this life.

They are crucial as we seek to grow in grace and as we do battle each day with sin.

Tonight I want to ask three questions:

- 1) What are the means of grace?
- 2) How are we to use the means of grace?
- 3) How important are the means of grace?

My purpose is two-fold.

- 1) I want to encourage you by reminding you of the bounty of God's provision for our salvation in giving us these means of grace.
- 2) I want to exhort you to pursue these means of grace with all diligence now and in the coming year.

This is a time of year when we are thinking again intently about plans and schedules. We look back and evaluate the year that is coming to a close. We look forward and anticipate the year ahead us. It is important that we set our priorities and plan our days with these provisions and blessings from God in mind.

I. What are the means of grace?

So what are some of these means of grace? I don't have an exhaustive list, but I want to mention 10 tonight.

1) Reading the Word of God

We need a steady intake of God's Word. It alone is able to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul tells Timothy:

1 Timothy 3:16–17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

We are to saturate our lives with Scripture—read it (1 Timothy 4:13), hear it (Romans 10:14), do it (James 1:22), study it (2 Timothy 3:16), sing it (Colossians 3:16) and memorize it (Psalm 119:11).

2) Preaching the Word of God

Along with reading God's Word, we should be regularly under the preaching of God's Word. Paul again tells Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

I can't emphasize enough the value of being in a church where the Bible is not only loved, but is faithfully taught and preached, verse by verse. I have encouraged our young people, as they make plans and set goals—as they prepare for the time when they will move out on their

own—high on the list of priorities should be finding and joining a church that will nourish them and their families with sound preaching and teaching of Scripture

We need faithful, consistent, balanced preaching of God's Word, preaching that brings to bear both the law and gospel. We need preaching that clearly declares God's Law that we might see His perfection and holiness, that we might see the way in which we should walk, and that we might see our sinfulness and understand our great need of Christ. And we need preaching that keeps the gospel ringing in our ears that we might not trust in or rest in our own efforts and strength, but trust and rest only in Christ, who alone can save us from sin.

We must keep ourselves under the preaching of sound doctrine if we are to know God's Word and live a life of practical obedience.

3) Meditating on God's Word

Once we read God's Word or sit under the preaching of God's Word, we should meditate. Meditation is pondering the Word in our hearts, preaching it to our own souls, personally applying it to our own lives and circumstances.

Meditation is how we sanctify our thinking and bring it in submission to Christ—taking every thought captive. Paul tells us in Romans 12:2 —

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

We need to take time to dwell on...

- The cross (considering what Christ has done for us)
- The law (recognizing and acknowledging our sin for what it is)
- The promises of the gospel and hope of eternal life
- The glory of God
- The wisdom and riches and blessings found in knowing and loving God

We need to gather fuel for our meditation...

- Our daily intake of Scripture (as we read and study the in Bible)
- Sermons we have heard (take notes, get recordings to hear them again)
- Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs we sing
- Books we are reading that teach sound theology and exalt Christ
- Godly counsel and conversation with brothers and sisters in Christ

4) Prayer

Prayer is the breath of the Christian. We are encouraged as God's people—

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

God has given us free access to His throne of grace. It is a gift of His mercy that we can call Him "Father" and cry out to Him in prayer. Prayer is a means of grace. It includes praise, adoration and thanksgiving as we exalt God and acknowledge what He has done for us. It includes petition (as we bring our requests), lamentation (as we voice our sorrows) and confession of sin. It includes private prayer as well as time in prayer with our families and corporately as a church.

Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 5—

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

5) Worship

Again God's Word beckons us—

Psalms 95:6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

Worship is a means of grace that helps us stay centered upon God. In worship we acknowledge God's holiness and greatness and sufficiency and we confess our sinfulness, weakness and insufficiency. Through praise and song, prayer and preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper, we set our attention and affection on God. Worship helps us keep a right perspective of who we are and who God is. We need times of worship. This includes corporate worship with God's people, family worship and private devotion.

6) Ministry

God equips us and gives us gifts to serve Him in the church. We are to use our gifts for the good and building up of the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 14:12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

And in love we are to devote ourselves to serving one another.

Galatians 5:13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

We are to occupy our time and give our talents to areas of ministry where there is need and where He has given us awareness, abilities and resources to meet those needs.

He also gives us our vocations and we are to stay busy with God-honoring labor. We are to consider ways to glorify God in our jobs—by the way we work hard, by our attitudes, by our responses and reactions, and by our concern and compassion for others who work with us.

7) Giving

Giving is another means of grace. We are to give intentionally and cheerfully to work of God's kingdom.

2 Corinthians 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving allows us to set a good direction for our hearts. Where our money and resources go, our heart goes also.

Matthew 6:19–21 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

8) Evangelism

When we share our faith with others, we are strengthened and encouraged. Peter reminds us—

1 Peter 3:15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

We must live for Christ before a watching world, always ready to bear witness of our hope and joy in Him.

9) Fellowship of the Saints

It is a great kindness of God that we are not called to live for God alone in this life. God has graciously given us one another and given us local churches to join and serve and covenant together. His Word exhorts us—

Hebrews 10:24–25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

We need to watch out for one another, help one another, and pray for one another. We need to encourage one another, engage in what the Puritans called godly discourse—talk about spiritual things. We need to serve one another, exhort one another and forgive one another.

God has not made us to love Him and serve Him by ourselves. He has designed us to be part of a body (1 Corinthians 12:12). He has fashioned us to be living stones, built together in a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5).

10) Family

Our families can be a means of grace—our homes a refuge from the darkness of the world and an outpost for the light of the gospel. We can testify with Joshua—

Joshua 24:15 “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

God uses our family to sanctify us:

- As we live out the gospel in our homes, loving one another, and forgiving one another
- As we teach our children and raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord
- As we engage in family worship and acknowledge God every day in our homes.

These are some of the means of grace that God has given us to help us stay near and focused on Him.

II. How are we to use the means of grace?

We must use the means of grace with humility and in submission to God. He is the One who is at work in us both to will and to do His good pleasure. We need grace and mercy and the power of the gospel at work in us if we are to use these means to the good of our souls.

All of these means I have mentioned are wonderful blessings from God, blessings we should pursue, blessings that should fill up our lives. But apart from Christ and apart from the humbling power of the gospel, all of these means have the potential to become a hindrance.

We can read and study—and even preach God’s Word—with the purpose of impressing others with our knowledge—to make us look wiser and put others down. We can pray and worship and serve and give to be seen and appreciated by others so they will think well of us.

Consider for a moment your family. God has given families for our good.

So when is a family a blessing?

You might say, when we can spend time with our families, when we can do things together. Those are certainly benefits of having a family—but the blessing of a family goes much deeper than this.

The family becomes an even greater blessing as we seek to make Christ known and live each day in the light of the gospel—in the presence of our children and in the presence our neighbors and our community. Our families are means of grace when we live in a way that commends Christ and demonstrates the power and reality of the gospel.

But can a family become a hindrance?

The answer is yes. A family can become a hindrance when we love our spouse or our children more than we love God. It can become a hindrance when spending time together keeps us away from the other means of grace—away from church, away from the preaching of the Word

and fellowship with God's people. A family can be a hindrance when it selfishly draws us apart from God rather than to Him for help and for praise.

We need the power of God and the work of His Spirit in us so that we are able to use these means of grace to nurture our soul and not feed our pride and selfishness.

III. How important are the means of grace?

The means of grace are vital for the care and wellbeing of your soul. Paul compares them in Ephesians 6 to armor that a soldier puts on before going into battle.

Ephesians 6:13–20 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

To neglect these gracious provisions of God is to put our souls in grave danger. I encourage you to think through these again in the days ahead.

Ask yourself these questions:

How much of my time do I give to these?

How important are these to me?

Would I miss them if they were not in my life?

Is my life marked by these means of grace?

As you look to the new year, I encourage you to make the wellbeing of your soul a priority. God is bountiful in His supply for our needs. Let's be diligent to use the means He has given us to work out our salvation.

Let's spend the remainder of our time now this evening in prayer.

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