

THE MEANS OF GRACE  
OR  
(HOW YOU CAN GROW AS A CHRISTIAN)

Earl M. Blackburn



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THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE. It is begun by a supernatural work of God's unmerited grace in one's heart and life. The Spirit of God applies the work of Christ on the Cross to many who are spiritually dead. He regenerates them and brings them to repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is called salvation. Salvation is a glorious work of God's grace and Spirit.

People often ask what happens after one is born again and begins the Christian life. Once God saves a person does He then leave them to make it into His holy presence in heaven on their own and by the works of their flesh? Paul the apostle says "No! Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3).

The Christian life is begun in grace, by God's sovereign Spirit, and is continued in the same manner. That does not mean there is no activity on the part of the believer. On the contrary, the Word of God plainly declares that those who are saved were "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10), and "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and do of His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12b, 13. NOTE: This verse, which is grossly misused by the cults, does not teach salvation by works. Rather, it is one of the many verses that show salvation to be totally by grace.) Furthermore, Christians are told to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18).

What has the good and gracious God of heaven given to His believing people to help them work out their own salvation, do the good works which He has ordained, and grow in grace? God has given specific things to accomplish these desired results. They are what theologians call the means of grace. This pamphlet will deal with these means of grace and growth.

When the means of grace are active in you, you will see astounding results in your life: spiritual growth, maturity, holiness, joy, and Christ-likeness. As these qualities are activated in your life there will be increased communion and fellowship with God the Father, Son

and Holy Spirit. You will be warmed and encouraged in walking with Christ. Spiritual strength and power to overcome temptation, sin, and Satan will be given to you. Help beyond description will be yours in every aspect of the Christian life.

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “MEANS OF GRACE”?

The Oxford American Dictionary defines the word “means” as “that by which a result is brought about.” Thus, the means of grace are channels by which God conveys His blessings to people. The Westminster Larger Catechism defines the means of grace as “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to His Church the benefits of His mediation [i.e. death].”

To illustrate this think of a lawn or garden water hose. A hose is not special in itself, but it is the channel through which life-giving and refreshing water flows. So it is with the means of grace. In and of themselves they are not special, but are the avenues and channels through which God’s life-giving and refreshing blessings flow. Through the means of grace, God imparts strength, peace, comfort, instruction, direction, reproof, rebuke, joy and many other things that are needful for the Christian life.

While the term “means of grace” is not found in the Bible, it is nevertheless a proper designation of that which is taught in the Bible. There are two types of means of grace: private and public. The rest of this study will deal with the different aspects of each type.

### WHAT ARE THE PRIVATE MEANS OF GRACE?

1. THE FIRST PRIVATE MEANS OF GRACE IS READING THE WORD OF GOD. God has given us a book in which He speaks to us. God no longer speaks in an audible voice, as in times past, but speaks to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-4). And His Son, Christ Jesus, speaks to us in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. It is in the sacred pages of His Word that He speaks with a voice that can wake the dead and give life.

The Holy Bible was written by holy men of God as they were inspired and moved along by the Holy Spirit. It is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction and knowledge. God is its author, salvation its end, and truth without any mixture of error its content. The Bible principally teaches what people are to believe about God, and what duty God requires of them. It reveals the principles by which God will

judge us and it is the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried. Therefore, as J. C. Ryle says,

“Make it a part of every day’s business to read and meditate on some portion of God’s Word. Yesterday’s bread will not feed the laborer today, and today’s bread will not feed the laborer tomorrow. Gather your manna fresh every morning. Choose your own seasons and hours. Do not scramble over and hurry your reading. Give your Bible the best, and not the worst of your time. Read all of the Bible and read it in an orderly way. I fear there are many parts of the Word which some people never read at all. To this habit may be traced that lack of broad, well-proportioned views of truth, which is so common in this day. I believe it is by far the best plan to begin in the Old and New Testaments at the same time, - to read each straight through to the end and then begin again. Read the Bible in a spirit of obedience and self-application. Sit down to the study of it with a daily determination that you will live by its rules, rest on its statements, and act on its commands. That Bible is read best which is practiced most.”

This is the means whereby God speaks to His people. As Christians read the Bible, God blesses and strengthens them with all they need for their daily walk.

**2. THE SECOND PRIVATE MEANS OF GRACE IS PRAYER.** What is prayer? Prayer is one way in which the Christian cultivates a living relationship with the living God. Prayer in personal devotions is indispensable. It involves talking to and communing with God. In this communion we offer up our heart-felt desires. It is how believers converse “face-to-face” with God. The Old Testament gives numerous examples: Genesis 18:23 ff.; Exodus 5:22, 6:1, 10, 12, 28-30; Deuteronomy 3:23-26; Psalms 27:8. The New Testament summarizes the same in Acts 13:1, 2.

Asking God for the good things He has promised each of His children is a vital part of prayer (Matthew 7:7, 11; Luke 11:5-13; Colossians 1:9-12; James 1:5, 6). According to Philippians 4:6 and 7, prayer is a key to a Christian experiencing God’s peace. It is also the means by which you surrender your will to God (see the Lord Jesus’ example in Matthew 26:39, 42, 44).

There are several parts to prayer. Prayer may include one or more of the following: adoration and praise, thanksgiving, confession of sin, supplication, intercession, and dedication of ourselves to God.

According to Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20, prayer is to be in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who helps Christians pray. He attests to the spirits of believers that they are the children of God and causes them to cry out “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). He prompts Christians to pray by bringing to mind the words and promises of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:26). He also burdens our hearts for others (Romans 10:1, cf. 9:1, 2). Therefore when you do not feel like praying ask God the Holy Spirit to help you pray.

Christ has given His people a pattern to help them pray. It is often called The Lord’s Prayer and is found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4. This pattern of prayer was not given to be recited as a ritual in private or in public. Reciting this prayer does not discharge your obligation to pray. Instead, Christ gave it to teach believers how to properly pray. There are six petitions in the prayer. The first three deal with God’s priorities and the last three address our needs. In this pattern, Christ is teaching us that before we can pray for our needs, we must first pray for God’s priorities.

3. THE LAST PRIVATE MEANS OF GRACE IS MEDITATION. After the Christian has come into the presence of God by reading the Scriptures and praying, he nurtures what he received by meditating. Thomas Watson, one of the Puritans, has said that, “Meditation is like the watering of the seed, it makes the fruits of grace to flourish.”

Meditation is to our soul what digestion is to our body. C. H. Spurgeon gave good instruction when he said:

“Our bodies are not supported by merely taking food into the mouth, but the process which really supplies the muscle, and the nerve, and the sinew, and the bone, is the process of digestion. It is by digestion that the outward food becomes assimilated with the inner life. And so it is with our souls; they are not nourished merely by what we hear going hither and thither, and listening awhile to this and then to that, and then to the other. Hearing, reading, marking, and learning, all require inwardly digesting; and the inward digesting of the truth lies in the meditating upon it.”

The attitude of the psalmist David was, “I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your Word” (Psalm 119:15, 16). He knew the value of meditation, as a private means of grace, some 700 years before Christ was born.

## WHAT ARE THE PUBLIC MEANS OF GRACE?

1. ASSEMBLING TOGETHER FOR WORSHIP IS THE FIRST PUBLIC MEANS OF GRACE. God never intended the true believer to live the Christian life alone. After Christ's ascension, the apostles went everywhere starting churches and ordaining elders in each (Acts 14:23). They did this so the young Christians could be strengthened, encouraged, guided, instructed, and above all worship God together. God, not man, ordained that by publicly assembling for worship, each believer would receive divine help and blessing for the days ahead. Together the people of God would not only receive God's benediction, but mutually fortify one another. Christians are commanded not to forsake the assembling of themselves together in public worship (Hebrews 10:25).

Historically, Christian churches have always worshipped on Sunday. It was on Sunday, the first day of the week, that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead and secured the fall of Satan's empire. Fifty days later, at Pentecost, again on the first day of the week, the Holy Spirit came as a mighty rushing wind filling and empowering the Church. Since then Christians have met on Sundays, the first, best, and brightest of days, to worship the first, best, and brightest of Beings, the LORD God of hosts and His Son Jesus Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

The elements of public worship are: public reading of Scripture, joined with preaching and teaching; the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; offerings; and prayer. In the reading and exposition of the Scripture, God speaks to us; in the singing, offerings and praying, we speak to God. While each of these elements of worship is important, the preaching of the Word of God is the most important. Our forefathers realized this when they wrote:

“The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word of God, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, ...”  
(*Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 89*)

2. THE ORDINANCES OF THE GOSPEL ARE THE SECOND PUBLIC MEANS OF GRACE. An ordinance is a custom and practice began by the Lord Jesus Christ while on the earth. In the true churches of Jesus Christ there are only two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is the first ordinance instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ while on the earth. He commanded it to be performed by His apostles and churches until the end of the world (see Matthew 28:18-20). A

professed believer who has neglected this, Christ's first command, has no right to call himself a Christian. Baptism is to be performed by total immersion in water, and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is reserved only for believers. It is not for unbelieving infants. There is not one instance of infant baptism in the New Testament. It has always been for those who repent and believe and are thus converted and saved (see Acts 2:41, 18:8). This ordinance was designed to be a testimony to the world that we are followers of Christ and to strengthen our resolve to follow Him.

The Lord's Supper, or Communion, is the second ordinance instituted by the Lord Jesus while on the earth. It is a divinely appointed means of strengthening the faith of believers. The Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice offered to God, but only a commemoration of that one time offering up of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, on the cross, for sins. As often as the Lord's Supper is observed, it is to be in remembrance of Him (1 Corinthians 11:24-26). It should never be missed unless providentially and legitimately hindered!

The elements of the Lord's Supper, bread and wine, are symbols. Each element represents a different aspect of Christ's atonement. The bread is symbolic of the bruised and broken body of the Saviour, broken because of our sin. The wine symbolizes the blood of Christ which was shed for the cleansing of our sin. There is nothing magical about the bread and wine. They do not change and become the literal, physical body and blood of Christ, but remain what they are.

A careful study of the Scriptures reveals the requirements for partaking of the Lord's Supper. The person must be one who is a true convert to Christ, baptized, seeking to walk in a way pleasing God, and a member of one of Christ's churches. Remember this ordinance was not given to individual Christians, but to local churches and their members.

**3. FELLOWSHIP WITH BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST IS THE THIRD PUBLIC MEANS OF GRACE.** God's people come from all types of background. Yet, the one thing that unites them all: they are in Christ! Christ loved them with an everlasting love and drew them with lovingkindness. All barriers fall before the electing, redeeming, saving love of Christ (see Ephesians 2:14-16).

Fellowship means “share together” or “shared life”, especially as it relates to other Christians. Again, when Christ saved you He did not intend you to live in isolation. You were meant to be a part of one of Christ’s churches and to enjoy fellowship with other believers (see Acts 2:41, 42). One of the most blessed things you realized after your conversion is the bond you have with true Christians.

Fellowship is not Christians socializing about sports, hobbies, weather, jobs, or politics. Although there is no harm in this. Instead it is the shared heart and life with one another in the things of the Lord Jesus and His Word. The uniqueness of Christian fellowship lies in being able to talk about and share together the joys, happiness, victories, problems, trials, sorrows, temptations and blessings of our walk with God. Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” Fellowship with Christians, in a local church, is iron sharpening iron. Fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ is a means of grace to keep us spiritually sharp and healthy.

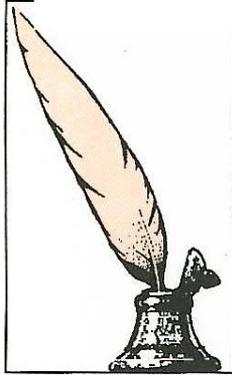
4. CORPORATE PRAYER (ACTS 2:42) IS THE FOURTH PUBLIC MEANS OF GRACE. The early churches not only continued in the apostles doctrine, the Lord’s Supper, and in fellowship, but they were faithful in praying together as a group. Church gatherings for prayer was one way of bearing one another burdens and fulfilling the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). In the book of Acts, there are many examples of the early Christians praying together. On the day of Pentecost, what were the believers doing? Praying! (1:12-14, cf. 2:1). Through the means of corporate prayer, the church saw the Lord God deliver them from the hand of their enemies (4:23-33). Peter was set free from prison because the church prayed together (12:5). The history of the New Testament churches is a picture of the blessing and necessity of prayer meetings.

All that is true of private prayer is true of public prayer, except public prayer is corporate, instead of individual. If God is with His people and individually blesses them with His presence, how much more is this true when the church comes together for prayer. If He hears and answers the prayers of one, how much more will He hear and answer the prayers of many? One of the Puritans, David Clarkson, has said, “The presence of God, which, enjoyed in private, is but a stream; but in public becomes a river, a river that makes glad the city of God.”

A gracious, wise and loving Father in heaven gave these means to His children for their good (see Deuteronomy 10:13). He did not give them to put you in bondage to man made rules, but to bless, strengthen and encourage you. The private means of grace are given for your daily Christian life in a work-a-day world. The public means of grace are given for your benefit in a local church of Jesus Christ. Put each of them into practice right now and watch your Christian life develop, grow and blossom. Pursuing these God ordained means will glorify God, increase Christ's kingdom and bring you righteousness, peace and joy.



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*“Study to show thyself  
approved unto God”  
2 Timothy 2:15*

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