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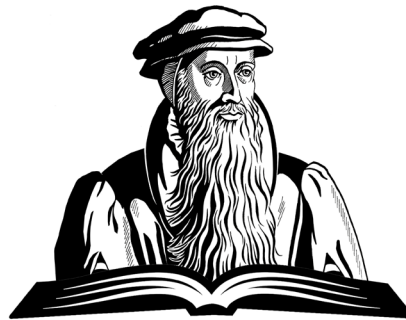
*by Rev. Jonathan Mattull*

Lecture #46

Escaping God's Wrath and

Curse: Means of Grace

*Catechism Question 88*



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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# *The Shorter CATECHISM*

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*by Rev. Jonathan Mattull*

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# *The Shorter CATECHISM*

## VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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### Lecture #46

## Escaping God's Wrath and Curse: Means of Grace

**Question 88:** *What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?*

**Answer:** *The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.*

With this lesson, we have the third of three lessons on the way of escaping God's wrath and curse. We should always remember this, that it's God's wrath and curse that we deserve, but God has very kindly supplied us a way of escape, all of which is through Jesus Christ.

Well, the previous two lessons considered *saving faith* and *repentance unto life*. In this lesson, we will look at the *means of grace* that God has given to us. We should also note that this Question sets up for the rest of the *Catechism*. We'll see in this Answer before us that we have the Word, and sacraments, and prayer presented, and the rest of the *Catechism* will deal with these three means of grace, the Word, sacraments, and prayer.

Well, for our Question, #88, "What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?" The Answer, "The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation."

Now there's a lot packed into this answer, but remember, much of it will be addressed in future lessons and Questions. For now, simply notice three words.

The first is "outward." This refers to things that are visible—things that we can see, and touch, or hear, things that are physical senses can experience.

Another word is "ordinary." This word refers to those things that are for all times and places. When something is ordinary, we might think of it as common. When something is "extraordinary"—extra ordinary—these things are above ordinary. Now this should not make us think of the ordinary means as insignificant. Rather, they are ordinary, or common, for the whole church, and for all times. They are special gifts. They are uncommon, so far as the rest of the world is considered, but they are common in the sense that they are for the whole church in all ages. So they are ordinary in that way.

Another word is “means.” This is a word that refers to an instrument that’s used. Sometimes we speak of “means to an end.” This conveys the idea of an instrument that’s used to produce something else, to accomplish something else. So you can think of a pencil. A pencil is a means, or an instrument, to write. We use it to make marks on a piece of paper, to communicate our thoughts in writing, that others can read it. You can think of a cup. A cup is a means, or an instrument, to quench our thirst. It carries water to our mouths so we can drink it. And you can think of an electrical wire as a means to carry electricity to a light bulb. With this, you can see that a means is not the same thing as the thing it’s carrying. A cup is not water; it carries water. A wire is not electricity; it carries electricity. A pencil is not writing; it is used for writing. So you can understand then, means that Christ uses are instruments that Christ uses.

Well, we can add another word for our consideration as well, and that’s “communicateth.” This word means “to share.” Think of verbal communication where we take words to share our thoughts and to have others understand this. So keep this in mind. Christ shares with us the benefits of redemption.

Well, for our lesson, let’s look at three main points. Firstly, *The Nature of the Means of Grace*; secondly, *The Identity of the Means of Grace*; and third, *The Blessing of the Means of Grace*.

So firstly, *The Nature of the Means of Grace*. Notice again the Answer to our Question: “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.” Well, there’s a lot here, as we’ve noted, but let’s look at just a few things that help us understand what these Means of Grace are, what they do.

We have already mentioned that the word “means” refers to an instrument used to accomplish something. Here we’re speaking of the means of grace—the instruments that God uses to give grace. So it’s what Christ uses to accomplish the work of salvation being applied to us. It’s not his accomplishing of salvation by means of his purchase—he’s died and risen again—that has, as it were, gained redemption. This is asking, How does he now take that redemption and apply it to us? Notice what he uses. He uses these means to communicate the benefits of redemption.

These benefits of redemption refer to all of the blessings that he purchased for his people. This includes regeneration; this includes conversion; this includes faith, and repentance, and justification, and sanctification, among others. It includes the peace of conscience that believers have. It is the assurance of salvation, their growth in holiness, their joy in the Holy Ghost. All of these things are what Christ has purchased for his people. Now you can understand this in one way. All of those things that come freely to his people, cost Christ everything. So they are a rich, an immeasurably rich treasure. And yet, he freely bestows them upon his people by the means of grace. So you could think of the benefits of redemption as the treasure that he purchased for us—the treasure of salvation. And what a rich treasure it is!

But the question comes, How does he convey, communicate, share, or give this treasure to us? Well, of course, he does it by grace. He does it graciously. This is undeniable. The Bible is very clear in this. But we can ask, How does he graciously give them to us? What instruments does he use? And the Answer before us tells us that he uses the “outward and ordinary means” of “his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer.” These are the things he uses to take the treasure he purchased, of salvation and all of its riches, and he gives them to us by these means.

Well, we’ll look at these means a bit more in a moment, but for now, notice this point. The riches of his salvation are conveyed, they’re given, they’re shared with, or as the *Catechism* says, they’re communicated to us by these means. This should amaze us in many ways, that so great

a treasure is even shared with us. It also should amaze us that the intangible and the spiritual blessings of salvation are given by Christ to us by the means of his Word, which we can read and hear; the Lord's Supper, which we can see and eat; and prayer, which we lift up our voice to God. Now, we shouldn't make a mistake and turn the outward means into the salvation and treasure itself. Well, surely, the Bible is most precious. Every word is perfect. It converts the soul. But here, we should remember this: we read the Bible, and yet it's not merely the reading of the Bible that saves us. God must bless the reading of the Bible. We're baptized, but it's not just baptism which saves us. It's that he must bless baptism, and we'll look at that in another Question. Always remember, these are means that God uses. We look through the means to the blessing, to receive Christ by them. And so we use the means diligently, but we do not turn them into a means of work and self-righteousness. We ever rely upon God to bless them to us, as we'll think through more fully.

Well, second, *The Identity of the Means of Grace*. What are the means of grace? Well, again, we'll look at this more fully in the coming Questions, as the Questions will deal with this more fully. But notice for now that the means of grace are, as the *Catechism* identifies, Christ's ordinances. An ordinance is something that one in authority ordains. You'll remember that Christ's church is his kingdom, and he is the King. And as King, he has the right to ordain what his kingdom should use and do. This is precisely what he has done in his Word. We could think of a variety of examples. When Paul is writing to Timothy, he says, "Preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). This is something that is to mark out all faithful ministers—they preach Christ's Word. Christ himself said, as he was to ascend, "Go," and what does he say? Disciple all nations, make disciples of all nations. Doing what? "teaching them," yes, but also, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19–20). And so it is that he's ordained the sacrament of baptism. You can see this with all of the ordinances.

If it is an ordinance, it is something that Christ has ordained. Notice very clearly, it's not the church's ordinances; it's *his* ordinances. The church can't invent things; the church can't come up with things; the church is to receive his ordinances. And among his ordinances, we find the reading and preaching of his Word. We find prayer, the singing of Psalms, the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We find personal and public fasting and humiliation. We find days of thanksgiving. We find the various officers of the church and their ministries—pastors, and elders, and deacons. We find the exercise of church discipline, the observance of the Lord's Day, the financial giving to support the cause of the church, and so on. The point is, there are many ordinances. And yet, this is what they have in common—two things: one, each of them is ordained by Christ; and secondly, each of them is a means by which Christ gives his blessing. Each of them is meant to be used as we noted earlier, to convey to God's people the various riches of Christ's redemption.

Now, the *Catechism* identifies three primary ordinances: the word, the sacraments, and prayer. This is not to deny the others that we've just noted. Rather, the *Catechism* is calling our attention to the primary ordinances and means of grace that are central to the life of the Christian and the church. And again, the rest of the *Catechism* will open these more fully. But for now, simply notice that these are the primary ways that we enjoy the enriching of our souls with the spiritual blessings of Christ Jesus. So what a blessing it is to have his Word! And oh, how large the Word should be in our lives! What a blessing it is to be taught to pray! And oh, how much our lives should be taken up with this! And what a privilege it is to have the sacraments! And oh, how we ought to treasure them! Why? Not because of any mere outward beauty to them. Not because of the corrupt



ceremonies that get added to them by others, but because they are the means by which Christ adds his blessing to us. Simply keep this in mind: when you use God’s Word, when you witness or participate in the sacraments of the Lord Jesus Christ, or when you engage in prayer, it will be seeking the grace that God promises to provide through them. They’re like channels through which the river flows, and these channels then convey to us the riches of salvation.

We do not mean that God always blesses these means with salvation. But we do mean that if ever we are to seek and enjoy his blessing, it will come to us by these means, as he blesses them. This is true, not only of the Word read and preached, it’s not only true of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as well as prayer; it’s also true of church discipline; it’s true of public worship; and it’s true of all the other things we’ve already mentioned. These are means by which God gives the grace of salvation. Therefore, whenever we see these, or we participate in them, we should look through them to God in Christ for his blessing.

So this can help us with some means that are difficult for us today—when church discipline is administered. The world thinks—and oh, how unfortunate that some in the church think— that church discipline is a mean thing. But if you read about what church discipline is meant to do, it’s meant first, of course, to bring honor to God’s name. It’s meant also to warn those church members present against those sins. But it’s also meant for the one who’s being disciplined, to convict them, and to draw them to Jesus Christ. It’s a means of grace. And it’s true of all of the means. and so we should start to use them with that in our mind, seeking that God would add his blessing to them.

Well, third, *The Blessing of the Means of Grace*. What is it we are to seek by these means? Well, remember, these are the means by which “Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.” That’s what we are to seek—the benefits of redemption. Well, we’re to seek them as they are means to that. Not as means by which we purchase them, but means by which Christ shares them with us. They’re his benefits, and yet he freely gives the treasure of salvation to us by them.

But to whom does he give these benefits, this treasure? Our *Catechism* summarizes, “all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.” We’ve seen this word “effectual” before, and we’ve seen this word “elect” before. Effectual means that which brings about its intended purpose. And the elect refers to those whom God chose before the foundation of the world that they should be saved. Now we don’t have time to look at all the ways the Bible shows this to be so with all of the means of grace. Let me give you one example, though, that’s very rich to help us see that the Lord uses these things to give the blessings of salvation for the elect. Notice Ephesians 1, verses 3 to 14. Now this is a longer passage, so listen carefully, or follow along in your own Bible, and as you do, pay attention to three things: first, *the blessings that God gives*; second, *the way he gives them*; and third, *to whom he gives them*. With those three things in your mind, listen now to the Word of God:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the

counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

Wow, what a passage that is—very full, and worthy of your study! But notice those three things. *The blessings God gives*: all spiritual blessings—salvation, forgiveness, adoption, inheritance of heaven—all of these benefits of redemption, by the blood of Christ purchased. *The way he gives them*: Paul said, “Ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (verse 13). Notice, they heard—the ear heard the Word, the means of the Word. Of course, they believed that Word, but the means that God used was the Word. Now, it doesn’t talk about the sacraments, and it doesn’t talk about prayer, but again, this is pointing out but one example. But *to whom does give these great blessings?* Well, in a variety of ways, Paul says, to those whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world, the elect.

There’s much here that you see, I trust. God gives his spiritual blessings purchased by Christ to his chosen people, by the means of grace. Oh, praise God that he has been pleased to do these things! That we would look upon the treasure of Christ with greater delight, and that we would look to God for his blessed provision to us, and that we would make use of the means, that we might, by his blessing, enjoy them.

Well, as we close, this should transform our approach to the means of grace, how we use them. We should learn to look upon them as God has appointed them. They’re means by which he blesses us. If we do so, it will transform the way, for instance, that we read the Bible, or the way we listen to sermons, or the way we engage in prayer. It will help us look through them, and by means of them, unto God. Notice, we don’t look to God’s grace apart from the Word. We look to God for his grace by means of the Word. No one finds their thirst quenched by a cup. They are quenched by the water that’s in the cup. It’s not the mere act of reading the Bible that satisfies our soul. It is as God blesses his Word to our souls that we enjoy the riches of salvation. We do not separate these things, the grace of God and the means of grace, but we do distinguish them. The means of grace are not the same as the redemption purchased by Christ. And so we need the redemption purchased by Christ, if ever we should be saved and enjoy those benefits. But the way God is pleased to give them to us and show them to us is by the means. And so we approach the means with thoughtfulness, with preparedness, and with an eye looking to God to bless.

Well, this then should lead us to a proper diligence, and not merely to be outward diligent—how many chapters of the Bible we read, how often we read, how many times a day we pray, and so on. Now certainly, we should read and pray daily, and doubtlessly, our lives should be more in reading and prayer and meditation. However, the kind of diligence that this should lead us to is more than just outward. It’s more than just listing how many chapters of the Bible we’ve read, or how many hours we’ve spent in prayer, or how many services of worship we attend. It is a diligent looking to God in Christ for his blessing. I encourage you to read through the whole of Psalm 119, and as you do, you’ll see this brought together. The psalmist is diligent—he’s meditating, he’s reading, he’s praying, he’s fasting. However, you’ll also see how regularly the psalmist is asking God to quicken him, to help him, to enliven him, to bless him. The point is, when we rightly understand the means of grace—the Bible, meditation, reading, listening, prayer, and so on—the more we’ll rightly use them, diligently looking to God through Christ to bless us.

So when you prepare to read the Bible, or as you prepare to go to worship God at church, and listen to sermons, and sing his praise in the Psalms he’s given, or as you set apart a day for fasting,

you should pause and ask God for his blessing. And you should never remove the conscious thought of your soul from this: “I need the blessing by God blessing these means.” There’s a beautiful passage that helps us with this, in Psalm 80, and verses 17 to 19: “Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” Notice, the psalmist asks God to bless by Jesus Christ, the man of his right hand, the son of man. And as God blesses through Jesus Christ, he quickens, or enlivens us to pray.

Here’s the point. When you approach reading the Bible; when you approach prayer, or singing praise, or worshipping God, or the other ordinances, always do so looking to God that he would bless you through Jesus Christ, asking him to provide you that blessing you so desperately need. And when you do this, you’ll be making use of the means of grace diligently and rightly, relying upon God to give unto you the blessings of redemption Christ has purchased.