

Systematic Theology 5.2.1

The Means of Grace in General

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Part Five: The Doctrine of the Church and of the Means of Grace — Section 5.2.1: The Means of Grace in General

Editorial note

The text has been updated to UK English; gloss boxes have been added to explain technical terms; summaries have been included; and questions for further study have been added. We have also included a master outline with the part represented in this volume shown in bold.

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Berkhof's Systematic Theology: Master Outline

This six-part guide is designed for use at the beginning of each volume. The part represented in this volume is shown in bold.

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The Means of Grace in General

I. The Means of Grace in General

God ordinarily communicates and confirms His saving grace through the Word and the sacraments. They are Christ's appointed instruments in the Church, effective only through the Holy Spirit, and should neither be treated as magical nor neglected.

A. THE IDEA OF THE MEANS OF GRACE.

GLOSS Means of grace: the Word and sacraments: Christ's appointed outward instruments through which the Holy Spirit ordinarily communicates and confirms saving grace.

Fallen man receives all the blessings of salvation out of the eternal fountain of the grace of God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ and through the operation of the Holy Spirit. While the Spirit can and does in some respects operate immediately on the soul of the sinner, He has seen fit to bind Himself largely to the use of certain means in the communication of divine grace. The term "means of grace" is not found in the Bible, but is nevertheless a proper designation of the means that are indicated in the Bible. At the same time the term is not very definite and may have a far more comprehensive meaning than it ordinarily has in theology. The Church may be represented as the great means of grace which Christ, working through the Holy Spirit, uses for the gathering of the elect, the edification of the saints, and the building up of His spiritual body. He qualifies her for this great task by endowing her with all kinds of spiritual gifts, and by the institution of the offices for the administration of the Word and the sacraments, which are all means to lead the elect to their eternal destiny. But the term may have an even wider scope. The whole providential guidance of the saints, through prosperity and adversity, often becomes a means by which the Holy Spirit leads the elect to Christ or to an ever closer communion with Him. It is even possible to include in the means of grace all that is required of men for the reception and the continued enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant, such as faith, conversion, spiritual warfare, and prayer. It is neither customary nor desirable, however, to include all this under the term "means of grace." The Church is not a means of grace alongside of the Word and the sacraments, because her power in promoting the work of the grace of God consists only in the administration of these. She is not instrumental in communicating grace, except by means of the Word and of the sacraments. Moreover, faith, conversion, and prayer, are first of all fruits of the grace of God, though they may in turn become instrumental in strengthening the spiritual life. They are not objective ordinances, but subjective conditions for the possession and enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant. Consequently, it is better not to follow Hodge when he includes prayer, nor McPherson when he adds to the Word and the sacraments both the Church and prayer. Strictly speaking, only the Word and the sacraments can be regarded as means of grace, that is, as objective channels which Christ has instituted in the Church, and to which He ordinarily binds Himself in the communication of His grace. Of course these may never be dissociated from Christ, nor from the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, nor from the Church which is the appointed organ for the distribution of the blessings of divine grace. They are in themselves quite ineffective and are productive of spiritual results only through the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORD AND THE SACRAMENTS AS MEANS OF GRACE.

GLOSS Special grace: God's saving, renewing grace, which removes sin and conforms believers to the image of God.

The fact that one can speak of means of grace in a rather general sense makes it imperative to point to the distinctive characteristics of the means of grace in the technical or restricted sense of the word.

1. They are instruments, not of common but of, special grace, the grace that removes sin and renews the sinner in conformity with the image of God. It is true that the Word of God may and in some respects actually does enrich those who live under the gospel with some of the choicest blessings of common grace in the restricted sense of the word; but it, as well as the sacraments, comes into consideration here only as a means of grace in the technical sense of the word. And the means of grace in this sense are always connected with the beginning and the progressive operation of the special grace of God, that is redemptive grace, in the hearts of sinners.

2. They are in themselves, and not in virtue of their connection with things not included in them, means of grace. Striking experiences may, and undoubtedly sometimes do, serve to strengthen the work of God in the hearts of believers, but this does not constitute them means of grace in the technical sense, since they accomplish this only in so far as these experiences are interpreted in the light of God's Word, through which the Holy Spirit operates. The Word and the sacraments are in themselves means of grace; their spiritual efficacy is dependent only on the operation of the Holy Spirit.

3. They are continuous instruments of God's grace, and not in any sense of the word exceptional. This means that they are not associated with the operation of God's grace merely occasionally or in a more or less accidental way, but are the regularly ordained means for the communication of the saving grace of God and are as such of perpetual value. The Heidelberg Catechism asks in Question 65, "Since, then, we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence comes this faith?" And the answer is, "From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments."

4. They are the official means of the Church of Jesus Christ. The preaching of the Word (or, the Word preached) and the administration of the sacraments (or, the sacraments administered) are the means officially instituted in the Church, by which the Holy Spirit works and confirms faith in the hearts of men. Some Reformed theologians limit the idea of the means of grace still more by saying that they are administered only within the visible Church, and that they presuppose the existence of the principle of the new life in the soul. Shedd and Dabney both speak of them, without any qualification, as "means of sanctification." Says the former: "When the world of unregenerate men are said to have the means of grace, the means of conviction under common grace, not of sanctification under special grace, are intended." [Dogm. Theol. II, p. 561.] Honig also distinguishes between the Word of God as a means of grace and the Word as it contains the call to conversion and serves to call Gentiles to the service of the living God. [Handboek van de Geref. Dogm., p. 611.] Dr. Kuyper, too, thinks of the means of grace merely as means for the strengthening of the new life when he says: "The media gratiae are means instituted by God that He makes use of to unfold, both personally and socially, for and through our consciousness, the re-creation that He immediately established in our nature." [Dict. Dogm., De Sacramentis, p. 7 (translation mine — L.B.).] There is, of course, a truth in this representation. The principle of the new life is wrought in the soul immediately, that is, without the

mediation of the Word that is preached. But in so far as the origination of the new life also includes the new birth and internal calling, it may also be said that the Holy Spirit works the beginning of the new life or of faith, as the Heidelberg Catechism says, “by the preaching of the holy gospel.”

C. HISTORICAL VIEWS RESPECTING THE MEANS OF GRACE.

GLOSS *Ex opere operato*: by the work performed: the view that a sacrament conveys grace by its own administration.

There has been considerable difference of opinion respecting the means of grace in the Church of Jesus Christ. The early Church does not furnish us with anything very definite on this point. There was far more emphasis on the sacraments than on the Word of God. Baptism was rather generally regarded as the means by which sinners were regenerated, while the eucharist stood out as the sacrament of sanctification. In course of time, however, certain definite views were developed.

1. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW. While the Roman Catholics regarded even relics and images as means of grace, they singled out in particular the Word and the sacraments. At the same time they failed to give due prominence to the Word, and ascribed to it only preparatory significance in the work of grace. As compared with the Word, the sacraments were considered to be the real means of grace. In the system that was gradually developed the Church of Rome recognizes a means that is even superior to the sacraments. The Church itself is regarded as the primary means of grace. In it Christ continues His divine-human life on earth, performs His prophetic, priestly, and kingly work, and through it He communicates the fulness of His grace and truth. This grace serves especially to raise man from the natural to the supernatural order. It is a *gratia elevans*, a supernatural physical power, infused into the natural man through the sacraments working *ex opere operato*. In the sacraments the visible signs and the invisible grace are inseparably connected. In fact, the grace of God is contained in the means as a sort of substance, is conveyed through the channel of the means, and is therefore absolutely bound to the means. Baptism regenerates man *ex opere operato*, and the even more important eucharist raises his spiritual life to a higher level. Apart from Christ, from the Church, and from the sacrament, there is no salvation.

2. THE LUTHERAN VIEW. With the Reformation the emphasis was shifted from the sacraments to the Word of God. Luther gave great prominence to the Word of God as the primary means of grace. He pointed out that the sacraments have no significance apart from the Word and are in fact merely the visible Word. He did not entirely succeed in correcting the Roman Catholic error as to the inseparable connection between the outward means and the inward grace communicated through them. He, too, conceived of the grace of God as a sort of substance contained in the means and not to be obtained apart from the means. The Word of God is in itself always efficacious and will effect a spiritual change in man, unless he puts a stumblingblock in the way. And the body and blood of Christ is “in, with, and under” the elements of bread and wine, so that they who eat and drink the latter also receive the former, though this will be to their advantage only if they receive them in the proper manner. It was especially his opposition to the subjectivity of the Anabaptists that caused Luther to stress the objective character of the sacraments and to make their effectiveness dependent on their divine institution rather than on the faith of the recipients. The Lutherans did not always steer clear of the idea that the sacraments function *ex opere operato*.

3. THE VIEW OF THE MYSTICS. Luther had to contend a great deal with the mystical Anabaptists, and it was especially his reaction to their views that determined his final view of the means of grace. The Anabaptists, and other mystical sects of the age of the Reformation and of later times, virtually deny that

God avails Himself of means in the distribution of His grace. They stress the fact that God is absolutely free in communicating His grace, and therefore can hardly be conceived of as bound to such external means. Such means after all belong to the natural world, and have nothing in common with the spiritual world. God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit, or the inner light, work directly in the heart, and both the Word and the sacraments can only serve to indicate or to symbolize this internal grace. This whole conception is determined by a dualistic view of nature and grace.

4. **THE RATIONALISTIC VIEW.** The Socinians of the days of the Reformation, on the other hand, moved too far in the opposite direction. Socinus himself did not even regard baptism as a rite destined to be permanent in the Church of Jesus Christ, but his followers did not go to that extreme. They recognized both baptism and the Lord's Supper as rites of permanent validity, but ascribed to them only a moral efficacy. This means that they thought of the means of grace as working only through moral persuasion, and did not associate them at all with any mystical operation of the Holy Spirit. In fact, they placed the emphasis more on what man did in the means of grace than on what God accomplished through them, when they spoke of them as mere external badges of profession and (of the sacraments) as memorials. The Arminians of the seventeenth century and the Rationalists of the eighteenth century shared this view.

5. **THE REFORMED VIEW.** While reaction to the Anabaptists caused the Lutherans to move in the direction of Rome and to bind the grace of God to the means in the most absolute sense — a position also taken by High Church Anglicans —, the Reformed Churches continued the original view of the Reformation. They deny that the means of grace can of themselves confer grace, as if they were endued with a magical power to produce holiness. God and God only is the efficient cause of salvation. And in the distribution and communication of His grace He is not absolutely bound to the divinely appointed means through which He ordinarily works, but uses them to serve His gracious purposes according to His own free will. But while they do not regard the means of grace as absolutely necessary and indispensable, they strongly oppose the idea that these means may be treated as purely accidental and indifferent and can be neglected with impunity. God has appointed them as the ordinary means through which He works His grace in the hearts of sinners, and their wilful neglect can only result in spiritual loss.

D. CHARACTERISTIC ELEMENTS IN THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF THE MEANS OF GRACE.

GLOSS Mediate: working through appointed means; here, grace ordinarily accompanies the Word and sacraments by the Spirit.

For a proper understanding of the Reformed doctrine of the means of grace the following points deserve special emphasis.

1. The special grace of God operates only in the sphere in which the means of grace function. This truth must be maintained over against the Mystics, who deny the necessity of the means of grace. God is a God of order, who in the operation of His grace ordinarily employs the means which He Himself has ordained. This, of course, does not mean that He has Himself become subservient to the appointed means and could not possibly work without them in the communication of His grace, but only that it has pleased Him to bind Himself, except in the case of infants, to the use of these means.

2. On a single point, namely, in the implanting of the new life, the grace of God works immediately, that is, without the use of these means as instruments. But even so it works only in the sphere of the means of

grace, since these are absolutely required in drawing out and nourishing the new life. This is a direct negation of the position of Rationalism, which represents regeneration as the result of moral suasion.

3. While the grace of God generally operates mediately, it is not inherent in the means as a divine deposit, but accompanies the use of these. This must be maintained in opposition to the Roman Catholics, the High Church Anglicans, and the Lutherans, who proceed on the assumption that the means of grace always operate in virtue of an inherent power, though their operation may be made ineffective by the condition or attitude of the recipient.

4. The Word of God may never be separated from the sacraments, but must always accompany them, since they are virtually only a visible representation of the truth that is conveyed to us by the Word. In the Church of Rome the Word retires into the background as having only preparatory significance, while the sacraments, considered apart from the Word, are regarded as the real means of grace.

5. All the knowledge which is obtained by the recipient of divine grace, is wrought in him by means of the Word and is derived from the Word. This position must be maintained in opposition to all kinds of Mystics, who lay claim to special revelations and to a spiritual knowledge that is not mediated by the Word, and who thereby lead us into a sea of boundless subjectivity.

II. The Word as a Means of Grace

The written and preached Word is the chief means by which the Holy Spirit brings and nourishes faith. The law exposes sin and guides believers, while the gospel proclaims God's saving grace in Christ.

A. MEANING OF THE TERM "WORD OF GOD" IN THIS CONNECTION.

GLOSS Word of God: here, especially the inspired Scriptures as preached in God's name and by His commission.

Roman Catholics can hardly be said to regard the Word of God as a means of grace. In their estimation the Church is the great and all-sufficient channel of grace for sinners, and all other means are subordinate to it. And the two most powerful means which God has placed at the disposal of the Church are prayer and the sacraments. The Churches of the Reformation, however, both the Lutheran and the Reformed, do honor the Word of God as such and even regard it as superior to the sacraments. It is true that the older Reformed theologians, such as the professors of Leyden (Synopsis), Maastricht, à Marck, Turretin, and others, and even some of a more recent date, such as Dabney and Kuyper, do not treat of it separately as a means of grace, but this is largely due to the fact that they have already discussed the Word in other connections. They freely speak of it as a means of grace. And when they consider the Word of God as a means of grace, they are not thinking of the Logos, the personal Word, John 1:1-14. Neither do they have in mind any word of power proceeding out of the mouth of Jehovah, Ps. 33:6; Isa. 55:11; Rom. 4:17, or any word of direct revelation, such as the prophets received, Jer. 1:4; 2:1; Ezek. 6:1; Hos. 1:1. It is the inspired Word of God, the Word of Scripture, which they regard as a means of grace. And even when speaking of this as a means of grace, they contemplate it from a special point of view. The inspired Scriptures constitute the principium cognoscendi, the fountain head, of all our theological knowledge, but it is not that aspect which we have in mind when we speak of the Word of God as a means of grace. The Bible is not only the principium cognoscendi of theology, but it is also the means which the Holy Spirit employs for the extension of the Church and for the edification and nourishment of the saints. It is pre-eminently the word of God's grace, and therefore also the most

important means of grace. Strictly speaking, it is the Word as it is preached in the name of God and in virtue of a divine commission, that is considered as a means of grace in the technical sense of the word, alongside of the sacraments which are administered in the name of God. Naturally, the Word of God can also be considered as a means of grace in a more general sense. It may be a real blessing as it is brought to man in many additional ways: as it is read in the home, is taught in the school, or is circulated in tracts. As the official means of grace, placed at the disposal of the Church, both the Word and the sacraments can only be administered by the lawful and properly qualified officers of the Church. But in distinction from the sacraments the Word can also be carried out into the world by all believers and operate in many different ways.

B. THE RELATION OF THE WORD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT.

GLOSS *Cum verbo*: with the Word: the Reformed expression that the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word to make it effective.

There has developed in the course of history quite a difference of opinion respecting the efficacy of the Word, and consequently, as to the connection between the effectual operation of the Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. Nomism in its various forms, such as Judaism, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism Arminianism, Neonomianism, and Rationalism, deems the intellectual, moral, and æsthetic influence of the Word as the only influence that can be ascribed to it. It does not believe in a supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word. The truth revealed in the Word of God works only by moral persuasion. In some of its forms, such as Pelagianism and Rationalism, Nomism does not even feel the need of a special operation of the Holy Spirit in the work of redemption, but in its more moderate forms, such as Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Neonomianism, it considers the moral influence of the Word insufficient, so that it must be supplemented by the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. Antinomianism, on the other hand, does not regard the external Word as necessary at all, and displays a Mysticism which expects everything from the inner word or the inner light, or from the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit. Its slogan is, "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." The external word belongs to the natural world, is unworthy of the really spiritual man, and can produce no spiritual results. While Antinomians of all descriptions reveal a tendency to slight, if not to ignore altogether, the means of grace, this tendency received its clearest expression at the hands of some of the Anabaptists.

3. In opposition to these two views, the Reformers maintained that the Word alone is not sufficient to work faith and conversion; that the Holy Spirit can, but does not ordinarily, work without the Word; and that therefore in the work of redemption the Word and the Spirit work together. Though there was little difference on this point at first between the Lutherans and the Reformed, the former from the beginning stressed the fact that the Holy Spirit works through the Word as His instrument (*per verbum*), while the latter preferred to say that the operation of the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word (*cum verbo*). Later on Lutheran theologians developed the real Lutheran doctrine, that the Word of God contains the converting power of the Holy Spirit as a divine deposit, which is now so inseparably connected with it that it is present even when the Word is not used, or is not used legitimately. But in order to explain the different results of the preaching of the Word in the case of different persons, they had to resort, even though it be in a mild form, to the doctrine of the free will of man. The Reformed indeed regarded the Word of God as always powerful, either as a savour of life unto life or as a savour of death unto death, but maintained that it

becomes efficacious in leading to faith and conversion only by an accompanying operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of sinners. They refused to consider this efficaciousness as an impersonal power resident in the Word.

C. THE TWO PARTS OF THE WORD OF GOD CONSIDERED AS A MEANS OF GRACE.

GLOSS **Law and gospel:** the law reveals God's will and sin; the gospel proclaims reconciliation and salvation in Christ.

1. THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL IN THE WORD OF GOD. The Churches of the Reformation from the very beginning distinguished between the law and the gospel as the two parts of the Word of God as a means of grace. This distinction was not understood to be identical with that between the Old and the New Testament, but was regarded as a distinction that applies to both Testaments. There is law and gospel in the Old Testament, and there is law and gospel in the New. The law comprises everything in Scripture which is a revelation of God's will in the form of command or prohibition, while the gospel embraces everything, whether it be in the Old Testament or in the New, that pertains to the work of reconciliation and that proclaims the seeking and redeeming love of God in Christ Jesus. And each one of these two parts has its own proper function in the economy of grace. The law seeks to awaken in the heart of man contrition on account of sin, while the gospel aims at the awakening of saving faith in Jesus Christ. The work of the law is in a sense preparatory to that of the gospel. It deepens the consciousness of sin and thus makes the sinner aware of the need of redemption. Both are subservient to the same end, and both are indispensable parts of the means of grace. This truth has not always been sufficiently recognized. The condemning aspect of the law has sometimes been stressed at the expense of its character as a part of the means of grace. Ever since the days of Marcion there have always been some who saw only contrast between the law and the gospel and proceeded on the assumption that the one excluded the other. They based their opinion in part on the rebuke which Paul administered to Peter (Gal. 2:11-14), and partly on the fact that Paul occasionally draws a sharp distinction between the law and the gospel and evidently regards them as contrasts, II Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:2,3,10-14; cf. also John 1:17. They lost sight of the fact that Paul also says that the law served as a tutor to lead men to Christ, Gal. 3:24, and that the Epistle to the Hebrews represents the law, not as standing in antithetical relation to the gospel, but rather as the gospel in its preliminary and imperfect state.

Some of the older Reformed theologians represented the law and the gospel as absolute opposites. They thought of the law as embodying all the demands and commandments of Scripture, and of the gospel, as containing no demands whatsoever, but only unconditional promises; and thus excluded from it all requirements. This was partly due to the way in which the two are sometimes contrasted in Scripture, but was also partly the result of a controversy in which they were engaged with the Arminians. The Arminian view, making salvation dependent on faith and evangelical obedience as works of man, caused them to go to the extreme of saying that the covenant of grace does not require anything on the part of man, does not prescribe any duties, does not demand or command anything, not even faith, trust, and hope in the Lord, and so on. but merely conveys to man the promises of what God will do for him. Others, however, correctly maintained that even the law of Moses is not devoid of promises, and that the gospel also contains certain demands. They clearly saw that man is not merely passive, when he is introduced into the covenant of grace, but is called upon to accept the covenant actively with all its privileges, though it is God who works in him the ability to meet the requirements. The promises which man appropriates certainly impose upon him

certain duties, and among them the duty to obey the law of God as a rule of life, but also carry with them the assurance that God will work in him “both to will and to do.” The consistent Dispensationalists of our day again represent the law and the gospel as absolute opposites. Israel was under the law in the previous dispensation, but the Church of the present dispensation is under the gospel, and as such is free from the law. This means that the gospel is now the only means of salvation, and that the law does not now serve as such. Members of the Church need not concern themselves about its demands, since Christ has met all its requirements. They seem to forget that, while Christ bore the curse of the law, and met its demands as a condition of the covenant of works, He did not fulfil the law for them as a rule of life, to which man is subject in virtue of his creation, apart from any covenant arrangement.

2. NECESSARY DISTINCTIONS RESPECTING THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

a. As was already said in the preceding, the distinction between the law and the gospel is not the same as that between the Old and the New Testament. Neither is it the same as that which present day Dispensationalists make between the dispensation of the law and the dispensation of the gospel. It is contrary to the plain facts of Scripture to say that there is no gospel in the Old Testament, or at least not in that part of the Old Testament that covers the dispensation of the law. There is gospel in the maternal promise, gospel in the ceremonial law, and gospel in many of the Prophets, as Isa. 53 and 54; 55:1-3,6,7; Jer. 31:33,34; Ezek. 36:25-28. In fact, there is a gospel current running through the whole of the Old Testament, which reaches its highest point in the Messianic prophecies. And it is equally contrary to Scripture to say that there is no law in the New Testament, or that the law does not apply in the New Testament dispensation. Jesus taught the permanent validity of the law, Matt. 5:17-19. Paul says that God provided for it that the requirements of the law should be fulfilled in our lives, Rom. 8:4, and holds his readers responsible for keeping the law, Rom. 13:9. James assures his readers that he who transgresses a single commandment of the law (and he mentions some of these), is a transgressor of the law, Jas. 2:8-11. And John defines sin as “lawlessness,” and says that this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, I John 3:4; 5:3.

b. It is possible to say that in some respects the Christian is free from the law of God. The Bible does not always speak of the law in the same sense. Sometimes it contemplates this as the immutable expression of the nature and will of God, which applies at all times and under all conditions. But it also refers to it as it functions in the covenant of works, in which the gift of eternal life was conditioned on its fulfilment. Man failed to meet the condition, thereby also losing the ability to meet it, and is now by nature under a sentence of condemnation. When Paul draws a contrast between the law and the gospel, he is thinking of this aspect of the law, the broken law of the covenant of works, which can no more justify, but can only condemn the sinner. From the law in this particular sense, both as a means for obtaining eternal life and as a condemning power, believers are set free in Christ, since He became a curse for them and also met the demands of the covenant of works in their behalf. The law in that particular sense and the gospel of free grace are mutually exclusive.

c. There is another sense, however, in which the Christian is not free from the law. The situation is quite different when we think of the law as the expression of man’s natural obligations to his God, the law as it is applied to man even apart from the covenant of works. It is impossible to imagine any condition in which man might be able to claim freedom from the law in that sense. It is pure Antinomianism to maintain that Christ kept the law as a rule of life for His people, so that they need not worry about this any more. The law lays claim, and justly so, on the entire life of man in all its aspects, including his relation to the gospel of Jesus Christ. When God offers man the gospel, the law demands that the latter shall accept this. Some would speak of this as the law in the gospel, but this is hardly correct. The gospel itself consists of promises and is

no law; yet there is a demand of the law in connection with the gospel. The law not only demands that we accept the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ, but also that we lead a life of gratitude in harmony with its requirements.

D. THE THREEFOLD USE OF THE LAW.

GLOSS **Threefold use of the law:** the law restrains evil in society, exposes sin and leads to Christ, and guides believers in grateful obedience.

It is customary in theology to distinguish a three-fold use of the law.

1. THE THREE DEFINED. We distinguish:

a. A *usus politicus* or *civilis*. The law serves the purpose of restraining in and promoting righteousness. Considered from this point of view, the law presupposes sin and is necessary on account of sin. It serves the purpose of God's common grace in the world at large. This means that from this point of view it cannot be regarded a means of grace in the technical sense of the word.

b. A *usus elencticus* or *pedagogicus*. In this capacity the law serves the purpose of bringing man under conviction of sin, and of making him conscious of his inability to meet the demands of the law. In that way the law becomes his tutor to lead him unto Christ, and thus becomes subservient to God's gracious purpose of redemption.

c. A *usus didacticus* or *normativus*. This is the so-called *tertius usus legis*, the third use of the law. The law is a rule of life for believers, reminding them of their duties and leading them in the way of life and salvation. This third use of the law is denied by the Antinomians.

2. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LUTHERAN AND THE REFORMED ON THIS POINT. There is some difference between the Lutherans and the Reformed with respect to this threefold use of the law. Both accept this threefold distinction, but the Lutherans stress the second use of the law. In their estimation the law is primarily the appointed means for bringing men under conviction of sin and thus indirectly pointing the way to Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners. While they also admit the third use of the law, they do it with a certain reserve, since they hold that believers are no more under the law. According to them the third use of the law is necessary only because, and in so far as, believers are still sinners; they must be held in check by the law, and should become ever-increasingly conscious of their sins. It is not surprising therefore that this third use of the law occupies no important place in their system. As a rule they treat of the law only in connection with the doctrine of human misery. The Reformed do full justice to the second use of the law, teaching that "through the law cometh the knowledge of sin," and that the law awakens the consciousness of the need of redemption; but they devote even more attention to the law in connection with the doctrine of sanctification. They stand strong in the conviction that believers are still under the law as a rule of life and of gratitude. Hence the Heidelberg Catechism devotes not less than eleven Lord's Days to the discussion of the law, and that in its third part, which deals with gratitude.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: Why do the Roman Catholics regard the Church as the outstanding means of grace? What accounts for their neglect of the Word as a means of grace? Why are the means of grace in disrespect among the Mystics? What distinguishes the Word and the sacraments as means of grace from all other means? Is it correct to say that they are administered only in the Church and serve, not to originate the new life, but to strengthen it? Is the Word of God exclusively used as a means of grace? How do the law and the gospel differ as different aspects of the Word?