



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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Means of Grace

*By Dr Iain Campbell, minister of Back Free Church of Scotland on the Isle of Lewis
(adapted from Banner of Truth website)*

In Reformed circles, the phrase ‘the means of grace’ has often been used, and its meaning has often been assumed. It is an important phrase, and it is important that we understand what its significance actually is.

The emphasis on grace is a reminder that it is possible for us to have a real relationship with God, and that such a relationship is founded and grounded upon his action toward us. Left to ourselves we would never move towards him, but he has taken the initiative in establishing a relationship with his world. Philip Yancey has written a book with the title *What’s so Amazing about Grace?*, reminding us that we should never lose the sense of wonder which John Newton expressed so memorably in his hymn, ‘Amazing Grace’. Every good thing we experience in Christian faith is on God’s express initiative.

Grace means that, although God was under no obligation to move to the rescue of his rebellious creation, he opted to do so, and to meet every contingency of man’s lost condition. To be effective, divine grace must be more than equal to human sin – and its effectiveness is seen in the fact that God is able to address every aspect of our fallen condition, and restore what he did not take away. The severed relationship he heals; the guilt of sin he deals with in atonement; the estranged sinner he reconciles; the dysfunctional soul he re-orders. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation, and the glory is all to grace.

But grace goes beyond the recovery of fallen man. In his theological treatment of the doctrine of man, Thomas Boston described regeneration as ‘begun recovery’. Becoming a Christian is only the beginning of the story. In Christ, man is a new creation; but like the old creation, there is a new theatre now in which the glory of God is displayed. Christian living means living in the light and in the grip of grace. That is why I just love James’ assurance – God gives more grace, not less, as our circumstances unfold and our lives develop.

But the Reformed tradition recognises, alongside its great emphasis on grace, that while we experience that grace personally and individually, we recognise...

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it through particular channels, or 'means'. There is a distinction to be made between means and ends – the end that God has in view is the transformation of our human character into the character of Jesus Christ himself, but he chooses ordinarily to effect that purpose through particular channels he has appointed to that end. This is emphasised in Westminster's high view of the church, outside of which, says the Confession of Faith, there is 'no ordinary possibility of salvation'.

The qualifier is extremely important. The Reformers did not believe that there was no possibility of being saved outside of the church – after all the Reformation was nothing if not a polemic against a theology that made the church and its sacraments indispensable to salvation. But they did believe that ordinarily God uses the church as the channel of his grace, in at least two ways.

First, God uses his own word as a primary channel of his grace. He has magnified his word above his name, and through its doctrines, precepts, stories and insights, he makes the word that he himself has breathed out, indispensable for our salvation. That is why the classic proof-text for the orthodox doctrine of Scripture – 2 Timothy 3:16 – emphasises that the Bible is both inspired and profitable. It is the word of God and it is the voice of God. It originates in heaven and channels grace to earth.

According to the New Testament, God has made the church the pillar and ground of the truth. The church ought to be the showcase for the word of God. Through the preaching and proclamation of the Word, rightly expounded and personally applied, God's grace does its work in the lives of individuals. Remarkably, God's grace does its work even when the Word is wrongly expounded, and even misapplied. His word achieves his goal, and flies into the hearts of men and women, with a grace that brings salvation.

Secondly, God uses the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper as channels of grace. That was never understood in the reformed tradition to mean that a church ritual or ecclesiastical activity was capable of effecting saving change simply by virtue of being carried out. There was no mechanical or magical way by which the hands of a clergyman could call down the grace of God.

But as ordinances appointed by Christ, and as visible representations of the Word which derive their effectiveness from the Word, the sacraments are also effective channels of the grace of God. They portray the same salvation as the Word preached. They draw the attention of the church to the only means of salvation – the finished work of Christ which remains outside of ourselves.

The Westminster standards, thirdly, make prayer a means of grace, along with the Word and the sacraments. Interestingly, the Heidelberg Catechism does not, presumably because it took the view that prayer is the evidence that we have received grace, rather than a means through which we receive it.

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Presumably also Heidelberg wished to protect the idea that, by definition, a means is something God uses, whereas prayer, by definition, is something we do.

However, preaching and dispensing the sacraments are also things we do. Westminster's emphasis is altogether fitting, since, according to the New Testament, prayer is not something we know how to do properly. We need the internal ministry and intercession of the Holy Spirit to enable us to pray in a way that is acceptable to God. And when we do, we make use of what the Bible calls the throne of grace. Anything that brings us there is a great means to a great end.

This may all seem academic, but it is anything but. There is a need to recover the creedal emphases of our faith, with their high view of the way God has chosen to minister his grace into the lives of his people. We have tended to dumb down the idea of the church, and even the need for it. But Christ has appointed it, and, however distasteful the idea might appear to some, outside of it there is no ordinary possibility of our receiving the grace of God at all.



Visitation of Eld Jack Ford at Woking Home, Woking on 18th April 2009 in celebration of his 96th birthday.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	Today: 19/04/2009	Next Week: 26/04/2009	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. Last Lord's Day, we welcomed Rev Daniel Tan & family, Pui Wah Wong & family, Kofi Aidoo, Marion Cole, Sarah Chee, William Yonathan, Elena Ang and Chen YanXin to our worship services.
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Jonathan Kim	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Lim Chee Boon	Rev Lim Chee Boon	
<i>Message:</i>	Making Your Calling and Election Sure (Part 1)	Making Your Calling and Election Sure (Part 2)	
<i>Text:</i>	2 Peter 1:1-21	2 Peter 1:1-21	
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Anthony	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	Joey Seow	Joey Seow	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Lim Chee Boon	Rev Lim Chee Boon	
<i>Message:</i>	O Fear the Lord, Ye His Saints	Sowing and Reaping	
<i>Text:</i>	Psalms 34:9-22	Galatians 6:1-10	NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS • Calling of Resident Minister: Continue to pray for the Lord's calling for Rev Timothy Ki to serve as our resident minister. Pray for his visa application. • DHW Bible Study: This will take place after the morning worship service. The study notes are available at the book table in the Fellowship Hall. • Annual Congregational Meeting (ACM): Please note that an ACM will be held on 26 April after the morning worship service. All members are required to attend. • Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony: This Friday, SGAT will hold their monthly meeting. There are 2 sessions this month, starting at 4pm and 7pm. The messages for these sessions are "The Apostle" and The High Priest." • Pray for those who are sick: Douglas (knee pain), Maria (ankle and joint pain), Constance (left heel pain), Margaret (cough) • Pray for those applying for visa: Josh & Hannah • Pray for on travel: Joshua & Hannah (New Zealand), Grace (S'pore), Chun Long (S'pore), Joy (Brunei), George & Susan (M'sia).
<i>Pianist:</i>	Sophia	Hubert	
Other Duties			
	Today: 19/04/2009	Next Week: 26/04/2009	
<i>Ushers</i>	Jonathan / Yetta	Daniel / Joey	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>PA Crew:</i>	Joshua	John	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 24 Apr	Young Adults Fellowship: Combined SGAT Meeting (4pm and 7pm)		
Sat 25 Apr	4:00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Rev Lim	
<u>Last Week's Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering: £526.30			
<u>The Blessing of Struggle</u>			
<i>Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.</i>			
The daily temptations which make every true life such a painful conflict from beginning to end bring us constant opportunities for growth of character. Not to struggle is not to grow strong. The soldier's art can be learned and the soldier's honours can be won only on the field of battle. If you would grow into the beauty of the Master, you must accept the conflicts and fight the battles. You can have life easy if you will by declining every struggle, but you will then get little out of life that is truly noble and worthy. The best things all lie beyond some battle-plain: you must fight your way across the field to get them. Heaven is only for those who overcome. None get the crown without the conflict save those who are called home in infancy and early childhood.			