

Sunday, Mach 24, 2024

## Handout - Lesson #4

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### Systematic Theology: Baptism as a Means of Grace

Chapter 11 of *Word, Water, and Spirit*

#### Introduction

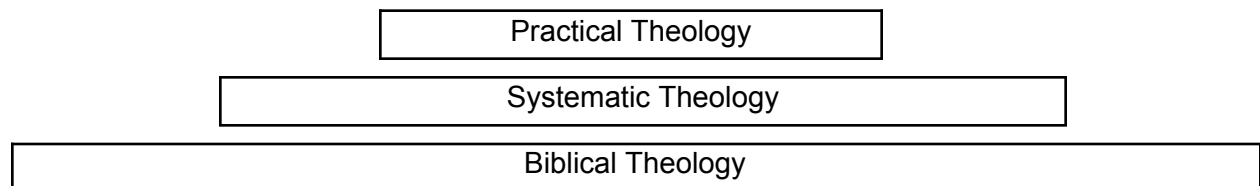
- Review
  - Lesson #1 - Historical Theology
  - Lesson #2 - Biblical Theology: Baptism as New Creation
  - Lesson #3 - Biblical Theology: Baptism as Covenant and Eschatological Judgment

#### What is Systematic Theology?

- Attempts to put Christian doctrines in orderly, rational, and logical order as it traces a theological topic through Scripture.
- Vern Poythress summarizes it as “a study of the Bible’s teaching in which we try to synthesize and then summarize what the Bible as a whole teaches about all kinds of topics - God, man, Christ, sin, salvation and so on.”<sup>1</sup>

#### Differences between biblical and systematic theology:

- Biblical theology is organized historically
- Systematic theology is organized topically
- There should be overlap between them and hopefully study of one would strengthen or deepen the other



Overall question we will be considering today:

#### **Should baptism be considered a “means of grace”?**

- Historically, the Reformed tradition has answered this question with a hearty YES
- This is the position we will take today and we will systematically prove why

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-relationship-between-systematic-theology-and-biblical-theology/>

Three aspects as to why the Reformed perspective has affirmed baptism as a means of grace and an answer to an objection

- Define grace
- Identify the means by which grace is received
- Look at the connection between the means of grace and doctrine of the covenant

Which of the following would best describe the Reformed view of grace?

- A. "The means of grace are any activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to Christians."
- B. "Through learning that a few things can carry the sacred, we become open to the fact that all things (all good things, all created things) can ultimately carry the sacred"
- C. "The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love"
- D. "I believe, yea, I know, that all the sacraments are so far from conferring grace that they do not even convey or distribute it."
- E. None of the above

## **Defining Grace**

### **How is the term used in the Bible?**

- We see that it is used in both a broad and a narrow sense
- Old Testament
  - Attributed to action between individuals - Ex. Joseph found favor in the eyes of Potipher, David's favor to Jonathan, or Esther finding favor in the sight of the King
  - Also used of God showing His favor to both those called righteous and those who are unrepentant - Ex. Nehemiah 9:17, 31 God shows grace to Israel in the wilderness even though they are unrepentant
  - Ultimately, it is not based on what people do but on God's will - summed up in Exodus 33:19 when God says "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."
- New Testament
  - It is used 155 times
  - Used 100 times in Pauline writings

- **Definition** - God's demerited favor because despite man's sinfulness, God doesn't give us what we have earned or deserve (namely His justice) but rather He gives His favor at His will
- When defining grace, it is broken into two categories in Reformed theology
  - Common grace - God's universal and undeserved goodness toward sinners bestowed on all mankind; this brings about no change in the nature of man (ex. Food is a means of common grace that nourishes us physically)
  - Special grace - God's favor in Christ that is applied directly by the Holy Spirit bestowed on His people (ex. The Lord's Supper is a means of special grace that nourishes us spiritually)
- The word is more often used to focus on special grace in the NT

### **Identifying the Means by Which Grace is Received**

- Our definition of *grace* will determine how we see God communicate grace to His people
- Definition of the *means of grace* - God's appointed instruments by which the Holy Spirit enables believers to receive Christ and the benefits of redemption<sup>2</sup>
- Broad/Narrow perspectives
  - Broad allows for many good gifts to be deemed means of grace
  - Narrow (the historic Reformed view) see God's grace as the person and work of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit, and this narrows the focus
- Differentiating Objective Ordinances and Subjective Conditions

### **The Connection Between the Means of Grace and Doctrine of the Covenant**

- Covenant Theology shows God revealing Himself progressively through redemptive history
- Are the means of grace better described as Overcoming Estrangement or The Favorable Meeting of a Stranger?
- Means of grace linked to revelation of the covenant means blessing/judgment - review of last week - no neutral encounters with God
  - L.S. and Baptism linked to blessing-sanction
  - Just as God's Word/Special revelation is double-edged, so are the sacraments
  - 1 Corinthians 11 - improper use of Lord's Supper led to judgment
  - Genesis 6; 1 Peter 3 - The same flood through which Noah and his family was delivered brought judgment on unbelievers

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<sup>2</sup> "What is a Means of Grace?" Nick Batzig. *Tabletalk* magazine June 2020

## **Conclusion**

- The means of grace are incomprehensible apart from covenant history
- God has revealed His audible and visible Word
- “Covenant is the realm in which God reveals Christ through Word and Sacrament”