

SALVATION - MEANS OF GRACE

“writings that give wisdom unto salvation”

Key question

How have various Christian traditions understood the means used by God to bestow his grace in salvation?

Key text

II Timothy 3:15

“and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Key Definition

Sacrament

A Sacrament is a means ordained by Christ whereby God imparts special grace to people with the effect that they are given the potential for or the benefits of a special blessing.

Introduction.

1. By what means does God’s grace come to the lives of believers, the church, and the world?
2. We will look at five major views.
 - A. **Social revolution has been seen as the means of God’s grace by some liberal theologians.**
 1. **A new hermeneutic** - Liberation theology rejects the Western orthodox understanding of theology based on a grammatical - historical interpretation of the Bible. It seeks to read the Bible in a way that relates it more directly to the experience of modern life as seen through the interpretation of class and political power struggles.
 2. **Three spheres or levels of salvation** are recognized in liberation theology. The first two receive the most attention.
 - a. **Class struggle for justice.**
 - b. Conscious responsibility for one’s own destiny.
 - c. Liberation from personal sin.

3. **Revolution** is the means of grace in our age as we seek to correct:

- a. **Economic** alienation - the poor are exploited by the rich.
- b. **Political** alienation - the powerful dominate the weak.
- c. **Racial** alienation - the unfair treatment of nonwhites by whites.

4. **An evangelical response:**

- Belief in the unquestioned privilege of the oppressed is prior to and independent of belief in the authority of Scripture.
 - Most people are in an ambivalent position, oppressors in some situations and oppressed in others.
 - It is not obvious from a survey of world history that God favors the oppressed.
 - Many other elements in human experience could be candidates for the position of a controlling model of God’s agenda.
- In the passages where special attention is given to the poor in Scripture, the following issues must be considered.
 - 1. The victims of today’s injustice frequently become tomorrow’s oppressors - as in Africa.
 - 2. Jesus was a friend to all not just the destitute and hungry. For example – tax-collectors.
- c. Social justice is a concept that is deeply connected to the post enlightenment culture of Western countries. The arbitrary choice (by God) of Jews over Gentiles does not seem just to a society that equates justice with freedom to determine one’s political destiny.

B. The Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church have for many been the only means of God’s grace.

- 1. According to the Roman Catholic Church, “The justification of the sinner . . . is ordinarily not a purely internal and invisible process or series of acts, but requires the instrumentality of external visible signs instituted by Jesus Christ, which either confer grace or augment it. Such visible means of grace are called Sacraments.” Joseph Pohle, *The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatise*, vol.1, p.1

Roman Catholic Justification	Protestant Justification
Transformationalist process	Forensic (completed) fact
“to make righteous”	“to declare righteous”
“condign” merit (a just reward)	“congruous” merit (sharing in Christ)
Justification / Sanctification	At the same time justified and a sinner
Implanted righteousness	Imputed righteousness
Faith formed by love	Faith alone (apart from love)
A Christian is as a Christian does	A Christian is as a Christian believes
Grace is love that inspires faith	Grace is Faith that inspires love

2. The three elements of a Sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church.
 - a. A visible sign
 1. Some form of matter (i.e.. water in baptism).
 2. A word of pronouncement by a properly ordained priest.
 - b. An invisible grace - the work of God's Spirit.
 - c. Divine institution - sanctioned by the authority of the true church.
3. Four views of the Sacrament.
 - a. **Council of Trent** - they are efficacious in imparting justification and sanctification when not resisted.
 - b. **Luther** - "exhortations designed to excite faith."
 - c. **Calvin** - "tokens of the truthfulness of the divine promises."
 - d. **Zwingli** - "signs of Christian profession by which the faithful testify that they belong to the Church of Jesus Christ."
4. The seven Roman Catholic Sacraments:

Sacrament	Procedure	Significance	Vatican II Emphasis
Baptism	Priest performs the rite on infants.	Produces rebirth, "infant Christian." Necessary for salvation. Frees one from original sin and guilt. Unites one to Christ and the church.	Baptism to receive greater emphasis. Convert to receive instruction beforehand. Illustrates commitment to Christ. Emphasizes unity of all members in Christ.
Confirmation	Bishop lays hands on person whereby the person confirmed receives the Holy Spirit.	Necessary sequence after baptism. With baptism, part of the "sacrament of initiation." Person receives the Holy Spirit, bringing one to maturity and dedication.	Endeavor to unite baptism and confirmation as one act of initiation. Separating the two sacraments suggest there are degrees of membership in the church.
Eucharist	Priest celebrates the Mass. Upon his pronouncing, "This is my body," the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.	The Mass is ongoing sacrifice of Christ. Same as Calvary, except the Mass is not bloody. In the Mass, Christ offers atonement for sin. Participant receives forgiveness from venial sins. Eating the bread is eating Christ.	Frequent participation encouraged to increase "union with Christ." Ceremony now involves lay people. Shorter, simpler ceremony; more use of Scripture.
Confession (Penance)	Three steps: 1. Sorrow for sin 2. Oral confession to priest 3. Absolution of sins by priest	Having confessed all known sins to priest and stated intention not to sin in the future, adherent receives absolution from sins by priest.	New view of sin: distorted personal relationship and motives. Allows for general confession and absolution. General confession performed in service of singing, Scripture, prayer, sermon, self-examination, confession, absolution.
Holy Orders	Ordination to office: bishop, priest, deacon. As successor to the apostles, bishop ordains priest.	Confers on recipient the priestly power to mediate grace through sacraments such as offering the body and blood of Christ to remit sins. Priest mediates between God and men as Christ mediated between God and men.	Greater involvement of lay people in ministry. Laypeople to develop and use gifts in church. Reduced distinction between priest and people. Priest considered "brother among brothers."
Marriage	Vows are exchanged in presence of a priest.	Sign of union of Christ and church. Indissoluble because marriage of Christ and the church is indissoluble.	Marriage is not only for procreation. Greater emphasis on love in marriage. Mass permitted at weddings with baptized non-Catholics.
Anointing the sick	Bishop consecrates oil. Person near death anointed by priest.	Removes infirmity and obstacles left by sin, which prevent the soul from entering glory. Prepares people for death by strengthening grace in the soul.	Broadened usage: changed from "extreme unction" to "anointing the sick." Used to strengthen/heal body and soul. Sick person shares in readings, prayers.

NOTE: The above chart is modified from Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine pp. 103, by H. Wayne House, Zondervan

5. Scriptures used to support a sacramental position.

- a. **Baptism** - Jn.3:5 “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Acts 2:38, 22:16, Eph.5:26, Titus 3:5
- b. **Confirmation** - Acts 8:17
- c. **Eucharist** - Jn.6:56-58
- d. **Penance** - Jn.20:22-23
- e. **Extreme unction** - Jas.5:14-16
- f. **Orders** - II Tim.1:6
- g. **Marriage** - Eph.5:22-33

C. **A Charismatic experience with the Spirit has been the focus of grace for some Christians.**

1. Some charismatic and Pentecostal groups believe that it is a special encounter with the Holy Spirit that is the means of grace to a believer’s life.
2. The Biblical teaching concerning the “filling of the Spirit” may give us insight into the charismatic experience. NOTE: There are 2 terms used in texts that speak of “the filling” or “fullness” of the Spirit:
 - a. **PIMPLEMI** (πιμπλημι)--This is a special filling which may be the best word to describe the charismatic experience today.
 - b. **PLEROO** (πληροω)--This is a term (translated “full” or “filled”) used to describe a state of maturity available to all believers. It is not dramatic (like PIMPLEMI) but more a description of character and growing power. It appears in Acts 6:3, 7:55, 11:24, 13:52.
3. The **contemporary charismatic experience** must be appreciated in the context of its uniquely American roots.
 - a. The theology of early American Methodism with its emphasis upon a **SECOND WORK OF GRACE** provided the soil from which the movement would emerge.
 - b. The style and methods of early American Revivalism with its emphasis upon **INDIVIDUALISM AND SENSE EXPERIENCE OF GOD** provided an important link.
 - c. The holiness movement and Charles Finney popularized the term “Baptism with the Spirit” in the last 1800’s, but it was not yet associated with speaking in tongues.
 - d. It was not until the charismatic movement birth (N.C. 1876, Kansas 1901, California 1906) that speaking in tongues was linked with Spirit Baptism at a popular level.
 - e. It was the Full Gospel Business Men International that spread the movement beyond the traditional Pentecostal denominations.
 - f. From America, it has spread internationally in the 1900’s.
4. The **charismatic movement** has received a lot of attention in the last few years with some helpful observations.
 - a. The theology of the movement is a theology of practice (not primarily of logic or reason). It is very sense-oriented (what do I feel). For example, there is a unique distinction made between **PRAISE**--something man does voluntarily as an act of obedience, and **WORSHIP**--a dynamic encounter with God where He touches us in a way we can feel (compelling us to enjoy Him and love Him).
 - b. The baptism does not come automatically. It must be:
 1. **taught** to the individual
 2. **sought** by the individual

3. preceded by certain **conditions** (Acts 1:1-2:1, 2:38)
 - a. **CONVERSION**
 1. water baptism
 2. faith in Christ
 - b. **OBEDIENCE**
 1. Active obedience
 - 1) separation from all known sin (Acts 2:38)--repentance
 - 2) heart purification (Acts 15:8-9)--sanctification
 - 3) prayer (Luke 11:13, Acts 1:14)
 2. Passive obedience
 - 1) yielding--emptying
 - 2) tarrying meetings (Acts 24:49)
 - c. **FAITH**
 1. total
 2. active or assertive
 3. directed toward the Spirit
 - d. **LAYING ON OF HANDS**
 - e. **SPEAKING BY FAITH**
 1. praise and worship
 2. practicing the form

c. What **characterizes** most Pentecostal groups?

Positive characteristics	Negative characteristics
Personal boldness and self confidence in ministry	<i>A lack of healthy self-awareness (carnality and weaknesses)</i>
Freedom in worship	<i>Preoccupation with the experience of Pentecostal worship</i>
Manifestation of supernatural gifts and ministries	<i>Preoccupation with the spectacular and manipulation. An inflated confidence in the "power."</i>
A radical trust of God for the impossible	<i>Truncated view of God's will. A lack of wisdom in faith.</i>
Love for the unlovely	<i>Hostility toward those who don't agree with them</i>
Openness to God's voice	<i>Arbitrary use of Scripture</i>
Willingness to be led of God	<i>Stubborn leadership, resulting in power conflicts</i>
Ecumenical spirit	<i>Divisive track record</i>
Zeal for God	<i>Not always according to knowledge</i>

D. The mercy of God has been broadened in the minds of many modern theologians.

1. There are some who believe that God’s grace is universally given to all without a special means or sacrament.
2. Some have modified this view to make generic “faith in God” the only means.
3. The position of the **Second Vatican Council** of the Roman Catholic church where it redefined what it means to be “in the Church.”
 - a. There are those who are saved because they are “**fully incorporated into**” the Church.

- b. There are those who are saved because they are “**linked to**” the Church through membership in other non Catholic groups.
- c. There are those who are saved because they are “**related to**” the Church as people of non Christian faiths or no faith but of good will.

E. The Word of God & faith are the only means of grace recognized by most Protestants.

1. The Scriptural support for the **WORD OF GOD** as a means of grace.

- **II Tim.3:15-16**
- **I Pet.1:23,25**
- **Ps. 19**
- **Jer.23:29** The Word is a hammer capable of breaking the heard heart.
- **Jas.1:23-25** The Word is a mirror reflecting one’s true condition.
- **Lk.8:11, I Pet.1:23** The Word is a seed bringing life.
- **Isa.55:10-11** The Word is rain to nourish the seed.
- **I Cor.3:1-2, Heb.5:12-14** The Word is milk for babies and meat for adults.
- **Ps.19:10** The Word is honey for all.
- **Ps.119:72** The Word is gold and silver.
- **Ps.119:105, Prov.6:23, II Pet.1:19** The Word is a lamp.
- **Jer.20:9** The Word is a fire impelling the believer to speak.
- **Jn.15:3** The Word is a cleansing agent.
- **Jn.17:17** The Word is a sanctifying agent.
- **Josh.1:8** The Word gives success.
- **Ps.119:105** The Word guides us.
- **Eph.6:17** The Word provides protection in spiritual warfare.

2. Evangelicals have believed that the Word of God and faith are the primary means of grace.

	God’s grace	Christ’s death	Man’s faith
Forgiveness	Eph.1:7	Matt.26:28	Acts 10:43
Justification	Titus 3:4-7	Rom.5:9	Rom.3:28
Reconciliation	Rom.5:1-2	Rom.5:10	Rom.5:1
Redemption	Eph.1:7	I Pet.1:18-19	Gal.3:13-14
Sanctification	I Cor.1:2-3	Heb.13:12	Acts 26:18
New life	Eph.2:4-5	II Cor.5:14-17	Jn.20:31
Adoption	Eph.1:5-6	Gal.4:5-6	Gal.3:26

3. The Scriptural support for **FAITH** as a means of grace.

- **Acts 11:17** “If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (to baptize)
- **Jn.1:12** “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name:”
- **Jn.3:14-16** “that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.”
- **Jn.7:37-40** “every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life;”

- **Acts 10:43** “that through His name every one who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins.”
 - **Acts 13:38-39** “through Him every one who believes is freed”
 - **Acts 15:9** “cleansing their hearts by faith.”
 - **Rom.3:21-4:8** “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”
 - **Rom.9:33** “and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.”
 - **Rom.10:10** “for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation.”
 - **I Cor.1:21** “to save those who believe”
 - **Gal.2:16** “a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus”
 - **Gal.3:2** “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”
 - **Gal.3:26** “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”
 - **Eph.1:13** “having also believed, you were sealed in Him”
 - **Eph.2:8-10** “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”
 - **I Tim.1:16** “for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”
 - **I Pet.1:8-9** “and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining **as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.**”
 - **I Jn.5:1** “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”
 - **I Jn.5:13** “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.”.
4. Is saving faith a gift from God or is it packaged with the image of God in all humans?
- a. Some Christians believe that saving faith is a gift from God that only the elect or chosen of God receive. The reasons given for this belief are as follows.
 1. If God is the solitary source of eternal life then the ability to believe must be packaged with the “call of the Holy Spirit” that brings a person to saving faith.
 2. If salvation is not by human merit or works, then faith must be a gift. If it were not, then it would be a meritorious work by man. This would mean that man contributed something to the saving process, which detracts from the grace of God.
 3. Several Biblical texts are often sighted to support the belief that faith is a gift.
 - Heb.12:2 “Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.”
 - Rom.12:3 “ God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”
 - Rom 10:17 “ faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.”
 - Eph 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” The “it” is linked to faith.
 - Rom 3:28 “a man is justified by faith.” If faith justifies and justification is of God and not man then faith must be of God.
 - Acts 14:27 “He (God) had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”
 - b. Other Christians believe that faith is a common grace that is given to all humans as a part of sharing God’s image. We all chose to exercise our faith in something or someone. The reasons given for this belief are as follows.

1. Faith is used in many different ways in the Bible. Not all references have to do with saving faith.
2. Faith is by definition not a work or a substance. It is the antithesis of “work” according to Paul – Rom.3:28. It is a response to the ministry of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit.
3. Faith is treated as though it is a function of 1) a “free” human response to God over against other objects or persons and 2) a human responsibility. Rom.10:8-13
4. Some popular texts that seem on the surface to support faith as a gift do not in fact do so.
 - Eph.2:8 speaks of salvation (not faith) as a gift. The Greek words translated “that” and “it” are neuter and do not match “faith” and “grace” both of which are feminine making it more likely that “it” refers to the whole of salvation. John Calvin interpreted the “gift” of this passage as “salvation,” and not faith (**The Epistle to the Ephesians**, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965, p. 144). This is in perfect harmony with Paul’s declaration that the “gift of God is eternal life” (Rom. 6:23). The text might be read “For by grace you have been saved through faith, that is to say, not of yourselves, the salvation is the gift of God.” Even John Calvin, who believed that faith was a gift of God, recognizes that this text cannot be used to support this teaching.
 - Salvation is by grace.
 - Salvation is through faith.
 - Salvation is not of yourselves.
 - Salvation is the gift of God.
 - Salvation is not of works.
 - Rom.12:3 uses faith as an expression of God’s gifts for service. This is not a text that addresses saving faith.
 - Acts 14:27 uses faith as an expression of the Gospel message. God opened the door to the Gentiles by the preaching of the Gospel to them.
 - Rom.10:17 suggests that faith in Christ is a response to the preaching of the Word of God (the Gospel). The message inspires faith.
 - Heb.12:2 suggests that Jesus is the “leader” (alternative translation) and perfect example of faith.
5. It is inaccurate to suggest that God gives men a special gift of faith so that they may be saved and subsequently sanctified. Instead, God has sent His Holy Spirit into the world to convict men of sin and to enlighten darkened and depraved minds to the saving truths contained in Scripture (John 16:8; Rom 10:17; Eph 3:9). From Ephesians 2:8 and the collective whole of NT data, God is presented as the gracious initiator who, through His Holy Spirit, woos and wins men to Himself. Man is depicted as the responder who, in his spiritually destitute state, is convicted and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and answers in simple faith to the promises of the Gospel. It is only fitting to contend that salvation is a superlative expression of divine favor, a *gift of God!*