

Weapons of Spiritual Warfare: Utilizing the Means of Grace

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Dr. Mary Craig

We are saved by grace through faith and given grace to obey through faith which works by love. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Grace. God is the God of all grace. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Thus we are exhorted not to insult the Spirit of Grace in Hebrews 10:29. Once justified freely by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, we are to yield to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. God ordained means through which He confers grace to His people. We are to avail ourselves of the means of grace, those outward and ordinary means ordained by God as Christ mediates the benefits of salvation provided in the New Covenant.

Every believer can enjoy God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, and hope of eternal relationship/life with Christ here on earth now as he/she continues to utilize the means of grace.

It's rather like being born with a gift, and having the gift but never discovering it, developing it, or using it. You live as though you had no gift and after you die, you face the reality that you wasted something very precious. Or, you could discover and appreciate the gift you were born with, practice and get coaching and develop the gift, use the gift for the benefit of others, and be a real blessing.

We have this gift, Christ and eternal life in Him. We can be like wedding glasses used once only to be wrapped up and stored in a closet. Or, we can be like fancy crystal glasses used only on special occasions, hand washed and stored in the cupboard. Or, we can be favorite glasses, used and washed, used and washed, and kept handy on the kitchen counter. Which do you think turns out to be "golden?" (See 2 Timothy 2:20, 21.)

...A large house contains not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. Some indeed are for honorable use, but others are for common use.

21 So if anyone cleanses himself of what is unfit, he will be a vessel for honor: sanctified, useful to the Master, and prepared for every good work.

2 Timothy 2:20, 21 Berean

Dr. Robert L. Reymond in his book, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, considers the primary means by which Christ communicates to His own are the Word, the sacraments of Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper, and prayer. These are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.

1. The Word of God as a means of grace is comprised of Law and Gospel. The Law serves (1) to bring a person under conviction of sin (Romans 3:20) in order to make one conscious of a total inability to meet the demands of the Law; (2) to lead a person to the necessity of Christ (Galatians 3:24); and (3) to serve as a guide to believers as to "what love looks like." The Holy Spirit uses the Law to restrain sin/evil and promote righteousness in a nation, a family, a person.

The Gospel declares the good news of Christ as the only way back to the Father, that Jesus lived a perfect life, fulfilled all righteousness, died to pay the penalty for sin, and rose again from the dead. The Gospel exhorts those to come to Christ in faith and repentance, and to rely and trust in Christ alone as the only hope of salvation. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. (Romans 1:16, 1 Cor. 1:18)

The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to enlighten, convince, humble, and build up believers in holiness, grace, comfort, etc. as the Word is faithfully read, preached, and searched. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to draw people to the Truth, to conform believers to the image of Christ, and to strengthen faith such that believers “grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18)

2. The sacraments of Christian baptism and the Lord’s Supper do not save anyone in and of themselves, but these are means of grace to the believer as they are received. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) includes baptism. Baptism is the outward sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life and it demonstrates faith as old lives/sin nature are left behind and new life in Christ is acknowledged. (Romans 6:4; Col. 2:11-13; 1 John 3:2, 23) In the Lord’s Supper we join ourselves with the Blood covenant and proclaim Christ’s death until He comes. (1 Cor. 11, Matthew 26:28; Exodus 24:8; Isaiah 53:12; Revelation 19:6-9)

3. Through **prayer** we actively communicate with the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. We come boldly to the Throne of Grace to obtain mercy and to find favor, or grace to help, in a timely way. (Hebrews 4:16) We talk, we listen, we worship, we express our wonder, we share our feelings and thoughts and all we are with all God is.

In addition God has ordained certain means by which His grace is improved in us. For example, as we embrace **proper worship** and partake in praise as individuals, as families, and corporately as the family of God, we grow in grace. **Honoring the Sabbath, receiving the Word read and expounded, offering prayers, singing songs to God, reaffirming our faith, pronouncing blessings, bringing the tithe and offerings, guardedly administering the sacraments, and giving sacred oaths and vows** all contribute to growth in grace. (Acts 2:37-42; John 16:8) **Subduing the flesh through fasting and abstinence encourages humility as an act of worship and means of grace.** (James 4:6; see also Isaiah 58)

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in community and oneness, and we also are brought into the community of the covenant people of God. **“One anothering,”** mutually caring for the members of Christ’s body through regular fellowship (Hebrews 10:23-25) and actively participating in “good works wrought in God” (John 3) affirm the Lordship of Christ in our lives. **Witnessing the gospel to others, giving glory to God through testimonies of God’s grace, and involving ourselves in communication that gives/ministers grace to the hearers** (Ephesians 4:29) all honor God and encourage growth in grace. Through these the Holy Spirit renews us and glorifies Christ. (Ephesians 2:10; Col. 1:10; John 15:8)

Now I want to talk about the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands, according to Dr. Wayne Grudem, is a means of grace. Here’s how he lays it out in his *Systematic Theology* © 1994, on pages 959-963. His Chapter 48 is all on the means of grace, for those who want to dig deeper.

Wayne Grudem lists the following as specific means of grace: **Teaching of the Word; The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper; Prayer; Worship; Church discipline which maintains the purity of the Church and encourages holiness of life; Giving (graciously, gladly, generously, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit); operating in one’s Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12; 1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16); Fellowship; Evangelism which ministers the message of saving grace; Personal Ministry to Individuals.**

As to spiritual gifts, the motivational gifts of the Father are found in Romans 12. The office/ministry gifts of Christ to the Body of Christ, the Ekklesia, are found in Ephesians 4. The manifestation gifts of the Holy Spirit are found in 1 Corinthians 12, and miscellaneous gifts are found in 1 Peter 4:10.

I wish now to address personal ministry to individuals using Grudem's *Systematic Theology* as a resource.

Ministering to other individuals and their specific needs in the church can take several forms. For example, words of encouragement or exhortation or wise counsel or meeting material needs of other Christians are all mentioned in the Word. (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 4:29; James 5:20; Hebrews 10:24, 25; James 2:16; 1 John 3:17; Acts 4:34; Galatians 2:10).

Anointing with oil in conjunction with prayer for a sick person is another interpersonal ministry. Jesus' disciples did this (Mark 6:13) and James 5:14 gives instruction to the calling of the elders of the church to pray for the sick, anointing the person with oil in the name of the Lord. The anointing oil symbolizes "the healing power of the Holy Spirit coming to the sick person." (Grudem, page 959)

Grudem notes that another form of ministering to other individuals in the New Testament is the use of physical touch, particularly the laying on of hands in conjunction with prayer. (Ibid, page 959)

Laying on of hands was the most common method Jesus used when praying for people. Luke 4:40; Matthew 8:3; Mark 1:41; 6:5; 8:23-25; Luke 5:13, 13:13. People came to Jesus asking Him to lay His hands on a sick person, e.g., Matthew 9:18. People sought to touch Jesus, for power came from Him. (Luke 6:19, e.g.) Jesus took little children in His arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16).

If we are to imitate Jesus and follow Paul's example, we would see "the laying on of hands in conjunction with praying for people for healing, for bringing blessing, for receiving the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion, for receiving spiritual gifts, or for empowering for ministry." (Ibid, page 961) Thus the laying on of hands would be "elementary," something belonging to foundational Christian teaching (Hebrews 6:1, 2), not just as that which accompanies installation and ordination of elders, but also as instruction for how to pray for others in various situations of need. Such learning stirs us up to love and good works, to ministering to the Body of Christ, and to blessing others.

According to Dr. Grudem, "when any of these [means of grace] are carried out in faith and obedience, we should eagerly expect and look for evidence that the Holy Spirit is actually ministering to people at the same time as these actions are being done." (Ibid, page 962) Likewise, we are not to neglect fellowship with other true believers (the invisible church) because we are to stir one another up to love and good works.

Let us be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Bibliography:

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Leicester, Great Britain: Inter-Varsity Press, and Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.

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Question 1: Once justified by grace, we are to yield to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. God ordained means through which He confers grace to His people. We are to avail ourselves of the means of grace, those outward and ordinary means ordained by God as Christ mediates the benefits of salvation provided in the New Covenant. What are the three primary means of grace?

Question 2: 2 Timothy 2:20, 21. Of what benefit is it to ourselves and to others as we discover, develop, and deploy (use) the means of grace and the gifts God has given to every “born again” believer?

Question 3: Look up Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 4:29; James 5:20; Hebrews 10:24, 25; James 2:16; 1 John 3:17; Acts 4:34; Galatians 2:10. What do these verses say about ministering to specific needs in the Body of Christ?

Question 4: Laying on of hands was the most common method Jesus used when praying for people. Look up Luke 4:40; Matthew 8:3; Mark 1:41; 6:5; 8:23-25; Luke 5:13, 13:13. What was happening in these verses?

Question 5: Look up Mark 6:2; Acts 14:3; Acts 19:11; Acts 4:29, 30. What do these verses tell you about laying on of hands? Is there any magical or automatic power inherent in the hands of early Christians and even today? Examine the prayer in Acts 4:29, 30. What did the apostles know? What is the appeal? What was God’s part and what was their part?

Question 6: Look up Acts 6:6. What took place? For what reason(s) was “the laying on of hands done in connection with asking God to empower or equip people for some service or ministry?” (Grudem, page 961) What happened in Acts 8:17; Acts 9:17; Acts 19:6? What was the purpose and the result? In Acts 19:6, spiritual gifts were imparted as evidenced by what? What does 1 Timothy 4:14 tell us about the **impartation** of spiritual gifts and how they are “stirred up”?

Question 7: What might you do or recommend another Christian to do when it seems he/she is slipping, sliding, drifting, side-stepping, confused about spiritual issues, etc. relative to the means of grace? In and in that event, what means of grace would you utilize primarily? Which of the means of grace could you utilize in order to be more effective in bringing blessing to further help the Body of Christ and the fellowship of the saints?

Question 8: Identify ten means of grace mentioned in this teaching and provide at least one Bible verse to support each.

Question 9: Which of the means of grace do you think have become “mechanical” in the life of the church, that is, outward or physical activity without any real participation in people’s hearts? Which ones do you think have been rarely utilized, less emphasized, less appreciated?

Question 10: Of what importance is understanding and utilizing the means of grace in spiritual warfare? Identify seven (7) Bible verses about grace that relate to spiritual warfare. For example, 2 Timothy 2:1, Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6 cf 1 Peter 5:5.