

Bible-Based Beliefs: Means of Grace

1. We believe that God bestows all spiritual blessings upon sinners by special means established by him. These are the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacraments. We define a sacrament as a sacred act established by Christ in which the Word connected with an earthly element gives the forgiveness of sins.
2. We believe that through the gospel, the good news of Christ's atoning sacrifice for sinners, the Holy Spirit works faith in people, whose hearts are by nature hostile to God (1 Peter 1:23). Scripture teaches that "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). This Spirit-worked faith brings about a renewal in sinners and makes them heirs of eternal life in heaven.
3. We believe that also through the Sacrament of Baptism the Holy Spirit applies the gospel to sinners, giving them new life (Titus 3:5) and cleansing them from all sin (Acts 2:38). The Lord points to the blessing of Baptism when he promises, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). We believe that the blessing of Baptism is meant for all people (Matthew 28:19), including infants. Infants are born sinful (John 3:6) and therefore need to be born again, that is, to be brought to faith, through Baptism (John 3:5).
4. We believe that all who join in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper receive the true body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine (1 Corinthians 10:16). This is true because, when the Lord instituted this sacrament, he said, "This is my body. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:26,28). We believe that Christ's words of institution cause the real presence—not any human action. As believers receive his body and blood, they also receive the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28) and the comfort and assurance that they are truly his own. Unbelievers also receive Christ's body and blood, but to their judgment (1 Corinthians 11:29).
5. We believe that the Lord gave his Word and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper for a purpose. He commanded his followers, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19,20). Through God's Word and sacraments he preserves and extends the holy Christian church throughout the world. Believers should therefore be diligent and faithful in the use of these divinely established means of grace for themselves and in their mission outreach to others. These are the only means through which immortal souls are brought to faith and to life in heaven.

6. We reject any views that look for the revelation of the grace of God and salvation apart from the gospel as found in the Scriptures. We reject any views that look for the Holy Spirit to work faith apart from the means of grace. We likewise reject the view that the law is a means of grace.
7. We reject the view that babies should not be baptized and that they cannot believe in Christ (Luke 18:15-17). We reject the view that baptism must be by immersion.
8. We reject all teachings that the Sacrament of the Altar offers nothing more than signs and symbols of Jesus' sacrifice, thereby denying that Christ's true body and blood are received in the Lord's Supper. We reject the view that those who eat the body of Christ in the sacrament merely receive Christ spiritually by faith. We reject the claim that unbelievers and hypocrites do not receive the true body and blood of Jesus in the Sacrament.
9. We reject the doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches that the substance of the bread and wine are changed entirely into the body and blood of Christ. Scripture teaches that all communicants receive both the bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16).
10. We reject any attempt to set the precise moment within the celebration of the Lord's Supper when the body and blood of Christ become present. We therefore reject the view that one must believe that Christ's body and blood are present as soon as the words of consecration have been spoken and the view that one must believe that Christ's body and blood become present only at the moment of eating and drinking.

This is what Scripture teaches about the means of grace. This we believe, teach and confess.