

Means of Grace

2 Timothy 3:14—4:5

Introduction

I have been asked, “What is it that drew you to the Lutheran Church? What is it about the Lutheran Church that sets it apart from other denominations and makes it attractive to you?” This month’s *Lutheran Witness* has a very good exposition on the LCMS compared to other Christian denominations. The main doctrine that sets us apart is the doctrine of Justification by grace through faith in Christ alone. However, other Protestant denominations believe that, to one degree or another. Even the “decision” denominations believe that it’s faith that saves, not works. But the big difference is the view on the Sacraments. For no other Protestant denomination sees the real, physical presence of Jesus’ body and blood in Communion. And most see the Sacraments as mere Ordinances, and confessions of faith, not acts of God. But, if we dig deeper, we see the reason for this belief in the Means of Grace is our belief in what Scripture is. **Verse 16 of 2 Timothy 3** says: *All Scripture is breathed out by God*. This is the basis for the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, which sets us apart from all others.

Breathed Out by God: The Word of God

Of course, when Paul is talking about Scripture, he’s referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, or what we call the Old Testament. But what of the New Testament books? Peter says in his second Epistle, when talking about Paul’s letters (Read **2 Peter 3:15-16**). Peter equates Paul’s letters with the Hebrew Scriptures. In **Deuteronomy 4:2**, God protects Scripture by ordering that no one adds to or subtracts from what He is commanding them. John gives the same warning at the end of **Revelation: I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Revelation 22:18-19)**. The whole Bible is the Word of God.

Authoritative and Unchanging

Since it’s the Word of God, that makes it authoritative. So, we have the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, that the Bible is our sole authority for living. Since God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, His Word never changes. We never have to worry what culture or society say. Society can change how it interprets life all it wants. It can change the definition of life. What we believe remains the same because the truth of God never changes.

Powerful

God’s Word is powerful. He spoke and all creation came into existence. He says His Word will *never return to Him empty; it will always accomplish what it sets out to do (Isaiah 55:11)*.

Profitable

Paul says *it is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (v. 16)*. These are works of the Law. Then he says that this is so the *man of God may be complete (v. 17)*. This is the work of the Gospel, to make us complete, as Paul says in **Romans 1:16 – I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes**.

How the Gospel Works Salvation

How does the Gospel work salvation in our lives? *Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ (Romans 1:17)*. When we hear the Gospel, the Holy Spirit works faith in us, so we can believe and receive salvation. But God has also chosen to work through other physical means to give us the grace to be saved.

Holy Baptism

In **Matthew 28**, Christ commands us to *baptize all nations*. In **Mark 16**, He says: *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16)*. When the Word is applied to the water, the Holy Spirit works faith in us and we are cleansed, forgiven, and saved. The Word that is applied is, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Holy Communion

At the Last Supper, Christ said of the bread and wine, *“This is My body ... This is My blood” (Matthew 26:26, 28)*. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10** – *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)*. When the Word is added, we receive the body and blood of Christ along with the bread and wine of Holy Communion. The Word that is added are the words of Christ from the Last Supper: *“This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me. ... This cup is the New Testament in My blood, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me” (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25)*.

The Greatest Gift

This is the greatest thing the Lutheran Church has to offer. Because the Bible is the Word of God, true, and powerful, we can come on a regular basis around this table and receive the gift of the body and blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Through this Sacrament, He gives us forgiveness of sins and strengthens our faith. What more could you ask for?

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
