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The Means of Grace.

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"Although the work of redemption was accomplished on the cross and forgiveness of sin acquired, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. For what would we otherwise know about it that such a thing was accomplished or was to be given us if it were not presented by preaching, or the oral Word? . . . Or how can they apprehend and appropriate to themselves the forgiveness except they lay hold of, and believe, the Scriptures and the Gospel?" (Large Catechism. *Triglotta*, 759.) Therefore Paul calls the preached Word the means of salvation. 1 Cor. 15, 1. 2. But if it brings us salvation, it also brings us forgiveness; for salvation and forgiveness are the same thing. Yes, the Lord directly regards His Word as the bearer of His all-sufficient merits. For instead of saying: "Ye are clean through the obedience by which I made satisfaction to the Father," He says: "Ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." John 15, 3.

But where there is forgiveness through the merits of Christ, there is life. Titus 3, 7; Rom. 6, 20. [Note. — "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." Small Catechism. *Triglotta*, 557.] Therefore the Lord also calls His Word the bearer of life. John 5, 24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word and believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life." And John 8, 51: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death." Yes, John 6, 63 He declares: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." And John 12, 50: The Word of My Father "is life everlasting. Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak." [Note. — *Ἡ ἐπιτολή τοῦ πατρὸς ζωὴ αἰώνιος ἔστιν* does not mean: "He that keepeth the Law of the Father hath life everlasting," but according to

John 17, 8: The words which My Father commanded Me to speak are the life everlasting.] If, therefore, the words of the Gospel are called the words of life, John 6, 68; Phil. 2, 16, then this means nothing else than that they contain and bring eternal life.

But how is this? Is not Christ *Himself* the Life? Did He not say to Thomas: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," John 14, 6, and to Martha: "I am the Resurrection and the Life," John 11, 25? Accordingly He linked the true life with faith in Himself. John 6, 40 He says: "This is the will of Him that sent Me that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him may have everlasting life," and John 11, 26: "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

True; and yet this is no contradiction; for the Son is in the Word. It is for this very reason that God's Word brings forgiveness of sins and life because it brings Christ. The vessel quenches the thirst because it is filled with water. And therefore all the dear fathers also drank deeply from it. And such in-one-another is not only possible, but within the limits of the kingdom of God also perfectly natural. Human promises are, of course, either lies or at best only shadows of things. But God *gives* when He speaks. "For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Ps. 33, 9. Men may indeed come and wish peace; that will not do much good; but when Christ steps into the midst of His trembling disciples with His salutation of peace, then their hearts, because of His words, become calm like the waves of the Galilean Sea. He giveth not as the world giveth. John 14, 27. If He, therefore, says to you in His Word: "He that believeth becomes righteous," and you believe, then you are righteous; for His Word is both almighty and true. Because it is the Word of the living God, therefore this Word, as upon wings, carries Christ's bloody merits into hut and palace. To speak with Luther: It is like unto a sled or conduit through which and on which Christ is brought to us. (St. Louis Ed., VI, 634.)

Also the words of Paul? Also those of Paul, yes, of all apostles. For between these words a chain is fastened which never breaks. Here the corner-stone is Christ: His words are life. John 6, 63; 8, 52. Thence the chain goes upward to the Father: Christ's words are the words of the heavenly Father. John 17, 8; 12, 50. And downward: the words of the apostles are the words of Christ, Luke 10, 16; 1 Pet. 1, 25; 1 Thess. 1, 8, yes, the words of God, Acts 4, 27, 29; Matt. 10, 20; 1 Cor. 2, 13. Therefore Paul writes

to the Thessalonians: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God." 1 Thess. 2, 13. In the first chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians he even threatens himself with the curse if he should ever dare to alter anything in the Word of God which he had preached. Gal. 1, 9. 10. So it is God's Gospel whether it comes from the mouth of Christ or that of His apostles, and it truly brings with it forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. [Note. — We say "Gospel"; for the Law, though it is also the Word of God, does not bring forgiveness.] Where can it be found? In Holy Scriptures, in the preaching [of the Gospel], and in the words of absolution. Here as well as there: under the pulpit, in the closet, and at the altar it makes righteous those who believe it. "Thus you see that the whole Church is full of forgiveness of sins." (Luther. St. Louis Ed., X, 634.)

But just as the Word of God is the means of grace, it is also the means of judgment. "He that rejecteth Me," says Christ, John 12, 48, "and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him: the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the Last Day." God deals with us only through His Word; even man deals with man in no other way.

It is a peculiar objection that this doctrine, which is the doctrine of Holy Scriptures, separates God from the world and gives the Word an independent position beside Him. It is the omnipresent God that speaks through the Word; how, then, can one speak of separation? Or by what right dare my efficacious word be called a power independent of myself? God's Word stands *beside* Him, that is true. For the Apostle Paul, at his departure, commended the elders of Ephesus "to God *and* the Word of His grace." Acts 20, 32. It is, however, never independent of Him. But God Himself gives it at all times and in all places where there are people who receive it. John 17, 8. You ask, Why does God not communicate Himself without the Word? He does not wish to give His divinity uncovered, else we should have to die; for God has said: "There shall no man see Me and live." Ex. 33, 20. That ends the matter. Therefore God must conceal Himself, so that we can grasp and take Him. He could indeed have chosen some other means to cover Himself. But just as a physician endeavors to administer his remedies to the patient in a fluid to which he is accustomed, so God uses a means which is familiar to man, the voice of speech, to give him the merits of Christ.

Thus it is evident that we receive forgiveness in the Word. Whoever does not lay hold of it there may open his mouth as wide as he pleases, he will nevertheless not receive it, just as little as a wanderer will cross a stream if he does not use the bridge spanning it. Therefore we praise God from our whole heart for having given us His Word, in which we can lay hold of His forgiveness. How could we otherwise "make a firm stand against the accusations of the divine Law, the great might of the devil, the terror of death, and, finally, against despair and the anguish of hell, if [we] would not grasp the divine promises, the Gospel, as a tree or branch in the great flood, in the strong, violent stream, amidst the waves and billows of the anguish of death"? (*Apology. Triglotta, 213.*)

Ancient and modern fanatics, however, are little pleased with this. They claim that every one must at least once in his life hear the voice from heaven: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee!" This, they claim, is justification. Luther complains: "They do not direct us into the outward Gospel, but into dream-land and say: 'Stand in idleness, as I did, and you, too, will experience it. The heavenly voice will come, and God Himself will speak to you.' . . . Do you see the devil, the enemy of divine order? How he . . . makes your mouth gape and meanwhile breaks down the path and way, the ladder, and everything by which the Spirit is to come to you, namely, the external ordinances of God in bodily Baptism, token, and oral Word, and wants to teach you, not how the Spirit must come to you, but how you must come to the Spirit, that you must learn to sail on the clouds and ride on the wind; and they do not say how or when, where or what, but that you will experience it as they did." (*St. Louis Ed., XX, 203.*) In fact, God will not act with His Spirit in concealment, as it were, and in secret nor do something in particular for each one individually; otherwise no one could know where to meet and find Him. No; He has ordered matters so that forgiveness of sins is to be outwardly with the Word and Sacrament, so that we may know that what is being done there is truly being done by God. "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? that is to bring Christ down [anew] from above" (who came down long ago), "or, Who shall descend into the deep? that is to bring up Christ [anew] from the dead" (who has risen long ago). (Rather,) "the Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the Word of faith, which we preach." On this wise speaketh

the righteousness which is of faith, according to Rom. 10, 6—8. And in order that no one may be in the dark as to how the apostle means this, he proceeds to say that justification comes to pass in this way, that you lay hold of the Gospel which is preached with your heart and confess it. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Rom. 10, 9. 10. Where is there one syllable in this text concerning an immediate communication from God, concerning a heavenly voice or the like? It is rather the Word which brings forgiveness, that Word which the apostles preached: There, in this Word, you are to lay hold of forgiveness. If you do not lay hold of it there, you will in vain stand gaping up to heaven for it. Luther says: Verily, "enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world, having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power, and strength of all heresy. . . . Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacrament. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments." (Smalcald Art. *Triglotta*, 497.) In this manner the Anabaptists fell into perdition, and to-day still many a one loses his faith in this way. First he hears a voice: "Thy sins be forgiven thee," which is true, but not on account of the voice, but on account of the Word of God. Then he hears another voice: "An office or great wealth will come to thee," which, however, does not come true. So his faith in the forgiveness is made to waver; for he concludes: "If the voice lied once, it lied twice." Therefore you should let voices remain voices and seek Christ in the Word; for there He is to be found. Not as though we denied the sweet comfort of the Holy Spirit in the heart; we rather rejoice in it. We say only this: The Comforter whom Christ sends, "speaks not of Himself; but whatsoever He has heard, that He speaks. . . . For He shall receive of Mine," says Christ, "and shall show it unto you." John 16, 14. 15. In this way He quickens God's Word in our hearts; and that is what the apostle means when he says of the justifying Word that it is in our mouths and in our hearts. Rom. 10, 8. For God's Word remains God's Word whether it comes to us through the memory or through the eye or through the ear. And it is never separated

from God, as the word of Plato is separated from Plato; but it is always truly spoken by the living, omnipresent God. Therefore the people must be taught not to meditate upon voices which they have or have not heard, but to lay hold of the forgiveness which is present in the Word which they are hearing; there is justification and assurance and everything. (Smalcald Art. *Triglotta*, 495.)

Moreover, the Word of God has in a special way assumed form, as it were, in the holy Sacraments. For the great fact that Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper bring forgiveness of sins is caused by the Word. (Luther. St. Louis Ed., XX, 275. 276; XIX, 1261; XVI, 1935.) Whether you take hold of the bare Word or the Word in the Sacrament, you always grasp Christ; for Gospel is Gospel, and faith is faith. Thus the Holy Supper brings forgiveness of sins by virtue of the Word; for "the words which stand here, namely: 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins,' do it. Which words are, beside the bodily eating and drinking, as the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins." (Small Catechism. *Triglotta*, 557.) Christ, however, does not come by blood only, but by water and blood. 1 John 5, 6. Therefore the Scriptures testify of Holy Baptism that it saves: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16, 16. As in other texts, *justification* and damnation are placed in opposition to each other, so here salvation and damnation, which is an indisputable testimony for the fact that with salvation we receive justification and with justification, salvation. Thus St. Paul writes to Titus (chap. 3, 5): God, "according to His mercy, saved us by the washing of regeneration," and Peter: The water "saves us in Baptism," 1 Pet. 3, 21. For this the word "cleanse" is substituted in Eph. 5, 26; and Acts 22, 16 we read that Baptism washes away sins, and Acts 2, 38, that Holy Baptism is received for the remission of sins; yes, Gal. 3, 27 it is taught that in Baptism we put on the Lord Jesus, that is, that in Baptism we are clothed with His all-sufficient merits as with a garment, in order that our nakedness might not be seen. But Scripture comprehends the full glory of Holy Baptism in this one statement — new birth. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee," says the Lord to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3, 3. Nicodemus does not understand this. Then the Lord explains what He means: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born

of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 3, 5. Where else than in Baptism does a birth "of water" take place? The remark of Calvin that water means Spirit and that "of water and of the Spirit" means "of Spirit and Spirit" is evidently rather an evasion than explanation. [*Note.*—*Aquam ergo et Spiritum simpliciter accipio pro Spiritu, qui aqua est.*—*Calvin.*] But if it is said: First water and after twenty years Spirit, then it should be noticed, first, that the text does not say this; and secondly, this conception evidently conflicts with the picture which the Lord Jesus uses. Verily, if regeneration were a development which lasted for a period of two decades, the Lord could not have chosen a more unfortunate picture to illustrate it than that of birth, which takes place in a moment. But in order to leave no doubt that Baptism is in truth the birth of water and of the Spirit on which salvation depends, He, shortly before His departure, said plainly and without figure: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark 16, 16. Now I ask every one who is still able to see with his own eyes: To-day God says: "He that is born of water and of the Spirit shall be saved"; to-morrow He says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved": now, is Baptism, apprehended by faith, the birth of water and of the Spirit, or is it not? If it is not, I am certainly anxious to know where the water will be found which is meant John 3, 5. The dear apostles at least knew none other than the baptismal water. Therefore they said of the baptismal water that it saves, 1 Pet. 3, 21, of the baptismal water that it cleanses, Eph. 5, 26, of the baptismal water that it washes away sins, Acts 22, 16, and that it brings the merits of Christ, Gal. 3, 27. Yes, St. Paul says, Titus 3, 5: God has "saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." And here even Calvin does not dare to deny that the apostle is thinking of Holy Baptism. [*Note.*—*Per lavacrum regenerationis. Non dubito quin saltem ad baptismum alludat. Imo facile patiar de baptismo locum exponi, etc.*—*Calvin.*] But "how can water do such great things? It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts such word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simple water only and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost." (Small Catechism. *Triglotta*, 551.) For when Scripture maintains these five propositions side by side: God saves,

2 Tim. 1, 9; 1 Tim. 2, 4; Jas. 4, 12; the merit of Christ saves, Rom. 5, 9; John 3, 17; 12, 47; Acts 4, 12; 15, 11; the Word of God saves, 1 Cor. 15, 2; Acts 11, 14; 1 Cor. 1, 21; Baptism saves, 1 Pet. 3, 21; faith saves, Luke 7, 50; Rom. 10, 9; Eph. 2, 8, — then these are either just so many contradictions, or God is the Physician, the blood of Christ the medicinal herb, the Word of God the fluid which contains it, and our faith the drinking thereof. And Baptism? It is the invigorating bath which the Physician prescribes first for every one who places himself under His care.

So also the Fathers teach. "On this account let no one boast of his works," says the Apology, "because no one is justified by his deeds. But he who is righteous has it given him because he was justified in the laver [Baptism]." (*Triglotta*, 151.) And the Small Catechism answers the question: "What does Baptism give or profit?" as follows: "It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this." (*Triglotta*, 551.) The Saxon Visitation Articles of 1592 teach with the same clearness: "There is but *one* Baptism and *one* washing [ablution]; not such as is wont to remove the filth of the body, but [such as] washes us from sins." And: "Through Baptism . . . God saves us and works in us such righteousness and cleansing from sins that he who perseveres in this covenant and confidence unto the end is not lost, but has eternal life." And: "Baptism is the washing of regeneration for the reason that in it we are born anew and sealed by grace." (*Triglotta*, 1153.) The Articles of Visitation reject, on the other hand, as erroneous and false the doctrine "that Baptism is an outward washing of water whereby an inner washing [ablution] from sins is *only signified*." Again: "That Baptism neither works nor confers regeneration, faith, the grace of God, and salvation, but only signifies and seals it." Finally: "That regeneration occurs not in and at [with] Baptism, but not till afterwards in adult years, and in some [many] not until old age." (*Triglotta*, 1155. 1157.) Aegidius Hunnius fights the same doctrine also in his private writings and declares that God in Baptism grants us two benefits: the reception into the relationship of children and new emotions in the heart, stating that the first is nothing else than justification. Gerhard teaches just as clearly: "Baptism is the efficacious means of the remission of sins" (*Baptismus est efficax medium remissionis peccatorum*); yes, God has instituted it for the very purpose of justifying us. And so they all teach. (*To be continued.*)