

CHAPTER 5.

THE MEANS OF GRACE

As far as we know, Paul and Timothy came to faith in very different ways. The experience of the apostle Paul, once called Saul, is well known. He was a persecutor of the church (Phil 3:6), an insolent opponent of Christ (1 Tim 1:13), and the worst of all sinners (1 Tim 1:15–16). However, the ascended Christ changed all of that, swiftly and dramatically (Acts 9). On the road to Damascus, Christ confronted the unbelieving Saul and turned him into a believing Paul. He took the insolent opponent and transformed him into a loyal preacher. The worst of all sinners became the most prolific of all apostles. All of this, as the apostle himself said, was entirely of God’s grace (1 Cor 15:10).

The story of Paul’s conversion is familiar, but it is not the only kind of story that can be told. To be honest, we do not know very much about how Timothy became a believer in Christ Jesus. However, the little that we do know indicates that the Lord took him down a different path than the apostle Paul. As the older apostle wrote to the younger preacher, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well” (2 Tim 1:5). Evidently Timothy grew up in a Christian household, at least as far as the maternal side of his family was concerned. Now faith is a gift of divine grace (Eph 2:8–9), not an automatic inheritance from human ancestors; however, it is undeniable that Timothy’s grandmother and mother must have been a great and positive influence

in his spiritual upbringing. Apparently Saul did not enjoy such blessings in his early life.

The grace of the Lord was evident in the lives of both of these men. Furthermore, the Lord's grace brought them to much the same point in the end. Both became faithful preachers in spite of opposition. Yet the manner and the means by which the Lord brought them to that point differed widely.

To be sure, many more examples of diverse stories could be told. Some have believed in the Lord as long as they can remember. Christian parents, godly fellow believers, and regular church attendance have all been instrumental in their spiritual development. For others there was a dramatic crisis—a day or a week that they will never forget—during which the Lord turned them from unbelief to belief. Maybe a certain Christian book played a big part in their path to the Lord. Maybe a particular congregation and its overwhelming outpouring of love left an unmistakable impression. Maybe a sudden near-to-death experience was all part of the turning point. Undoubtedly, you could add your own personal list of things that have made a significant difference in your spiritual growth. In short, the Lord, who controls all things in his providence, uses a vast diversity of events and individuals as he continues to gather people into his holy church.

Mindful of all this, we might be inclined to develop a long list of things called *means of grace*. After all, the Lord uses many different instruments to help us in our spiritual lives. For our present purposes, though, we need to realize that historically the term *means of grace* has been used in a more specialized sense, referring to two instruments that the Lord normally uses to plant and cultivate faith in his children: the preaching of his Word and the use of the sacraments, both baptism and Lord's supper. This does not mean that all the other gracious blessings—godly parents, considerate fellow Christians, stimulating books, and much more—are immaterial or unimportant. Far from it! It is simply the case that the term *means of grace* normally has a special meaning which refers to the preaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments. As we explore the

reasons for, and further details of, this definition of the means of grace, it should also become clear that there is good reason for doing so.

WHAT ARE THE MEANS OF GRACE?

When speaking of the means of grace, we are essentially looking for an answer to this question: what are the tools, or instruments, that the Lord normally uses to generate and sustain saving faith in the hearts of fallen human beings? In order to answer that question properly, it is helpful to turn to Matthew 28:19–20 and Mark 16:15–16. In both passages the resurrected Christ is ready to return to his Father in heaven and begin gathering his New Testament church through his apostles. In order to do so, he commands his apostles to preach the gospel as well as to administer the sacraments, particularly the sacrament of baptism. For example, our Saviour says, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:15–16).

Of course, the apostles will have to do many more things, including offering up prayers (Eph 1:16), bringing order in the church (1 Cor 5), and visiting the members of the congregation from house to house (Acts 20:20). Each one of those activities is valuable. However, the truth remains that on the pivotal occasion of his ascension Christ himself shone the spotlight on the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. This priority is again reflected when the older apostle Paul is passing on the torch of responsibility to his younger colleague Timothy and he urges him: “Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2). Yes, he will also have to discharge all the other duties of his ministry (2 Tim 4:5), but the preaching stands primary and central.

Not surprisingly, then, the Reformed confessions pick up this emphasis of the resurrected Christ. Let us walk through a few articles of the Canons of Dort that use the concept of the means of grace. We begin with the first chapter, concerning election:

Some do not yet clearly discern in themselves a living faith in Christ, an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ; nevertheless, they use *the means* through which God has promised to work these things in us. They ought not to be alarmed when reprobation is mentioned, nor to count themselves among the reprobate. Rather, they must diligently continue in the use of *these means*, fervently desire a time of more abundant grace, and expect it with reverence and humility (Art. 16).

Two things are immediately obvious from this quotation. First, the term *means* is not clearly defined at this point in the Canons. In fact, a clearer definition will be found in the next two quotations. However, there is an initial, albeit implicit, definition in the Canons of Dort 1.7 where we confess that God effectually calls the elect into communion with him “through his Word and Spirit.” Thus, the Holy Spirit uses the Word to reconcile sinners unto God, and therefore the Word is the means.

Second, the Canons not only want us to understand *what* the means of grace are, but also the pastoral context in which their importance really shines. As Canons of Dort 1.16 points out, when God’s people wonder if they have a “living faith in Christ,” or if they are among those whom God has left “in the common misery into which they have by their own fault plunged themselves” (CoD 1.15), then they should not drift off into an introspective, brooding spiral of doubt. Rather, they should concentrate on the means of grace, which clearly focus on the Word of God. His Word is clear, definite, and unchanging—unlike the ever-shifting state of our own spiritual confidence. Thus, under the Lord’s blessing, faith will be fortified when the means are faithfully used.

Next, we turn to an extended quotation from the combined third and fourth chapter of the Canons of Dort:

The almighty working of God whereby he brings forth and sustains this our natural life does not exclude but requires *the use of means*, by which he according to his infinite wisdom and goodness has willed to exercise his power. So also the aforementioned supernatural working of God whereby he regenerates us, in no way excludes or cancels *the use of the gospel*, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and the food

of the soul. For this reason the apostles and the teachers who succeeded them, reverently instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to his glory and to the abasement of all pride. In the meantime, however, they did not neglect to keep them, *by the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline*. So today those who give or receive instruction in the church should not dare to tempt God by separating what he in his good pleasure has willed to be closely joined together. For grace is conferred *through admonitions*, and the more readily we do our duty, the more this favour of God, who works in us, usually manifests itself in its lustre, and so his work best proceeds. To God alone, both *for the means and for their saving fruit and efficacy*, all glory is due throughout eternity. Amen (Art. 17).

Again, a number of things are noteworthy. To begin with, the administration of the Word is the central means by which God confers his grace on people. The sacraments are also mentioned, and by discipline the office-bearers ensure that members of the church remain under the administration of the Word and sacraments, but clearly the preaching of the gospel, including its admonitions, is the key instrument by which God works faith and salvation in the lives of sinners.

Following this, there is an instructive parallel between our natural life and our new, regenerated life.¹ In our natural, or physical, life we fully understand the importance of means. Good health is certainly a gift from God, but we must also eat a healthy, balanced diet and do some exercise. Strangely, some people expect that our new Spirit-given life will work in a fundamentally different way. They suppose that faith will be created and maintained in some kind of instantaneous, miraculous, and rather extraordinary way. True enough, all grace is ultimately extraordinary, but God can work extraordinary blessings through ordinary means. He does this to keep our bodies healthy, and he uses a similar method, if we can call it that, in order to keep our souls healthy.

At the same time, speaking of means, or instruments, of grace does not reduce the divine origin of salvation. Undoubtedly, the Word is admin-

1. Also see Article 35 of the Belgic Confession where the same parallel appears in connection with the Lord's supper.

istered by the preaching of a sinful man. Yet this does not mean that salvation becomes a synergistic co-operation between God and man. As we read in Canons of Dort 3/4.17, “*both* for the means and for their saving fruit and efficacy” we give all the glory to God alone.

Finally, in the last chapter of the Canons, on the perseverance of the saints, Article 14 is entitled “The Use of Means in Perseverance.” It reads as follows:

Just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the preaching of the gospel, so he maintains, continues, and perfects it *by the hearing and reading of his Word*, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and *by the use of the sacraments*.

Three brief observations are in order. First, God not only uses means when he begins his work of grace in our lives, but he also uses means to continue that same work of grace. At whatever stage of salvation, the Lord regularly chooses to use means. It is his usual *modus operandi*, or manner of working.

Second, two means of grace are mentioned: the Word and the sacraments. As we have seen in the other two articles, the Word is also emphasized here when the Canons further specify that we should give our attention to “the reading and hearing” of the Word, as well as to “meditation on it,” including “its exhortations, threats, and promises.” This does not mean that the sacraments are unimportant. As we will discover a little later in this volume, that is hardly the case. Still, the sacraments clearly play a secondary role, confirming what the Lord says in his Word.

Third, this article on the use of means is part of the chapter on perseverance, which highlights the assurance of faith. Please note how often words such as “faith,” “assurance,” and “true believers” occur in this chapter (Arts. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15). Clearly the use of means is connected in a special way to nurturing the assurance of faith in the hearts of God’s people.

This last point, the connection between the means and faith, is made explicit in Lord's Day 25 of the Heidelberg Catechism. There the question is asked, "Since then faith alone makes us share in Christ and all his benefits, where does this faith come from?" Next, although the term *means of grace* is not used, the same two instruments are mentioned when the Catechism answers, "From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments." Intentionally, the Catechism distinguishes between how the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel to *work* faith and the use of the sacraments to *strengthen* it. This does not mean that the preaching of the gospel does not contribute anything toward the ongoing fortification of faith. By no means. It does indicate, though, that the Holy Spirit uses each means in a specialized way.

As already confessed in Lord's Day 7, faith is a true knowledge which accepts everything that God has revealed in his Word as true. Due to this direct connection between faith and the revealed Word, Lord's Day 25 joins the preaching of the gospel and the working of faith. At the same time, there is always a need for sustaining and strengthening faith. Thus, bearing in mind our weaknesses (BC 33), God has ordained the sacraments—which we can see, touch, and even taste and which are therefore particularly well suited for building up the assurance of our faith. This corresponds to the second aspect of faith, mentioned in Lord's Day 7 when it says that faith includes "a firm confidence" that God has granted salvation also to me personally. In sum, then, the two distinct means of grace serve and support the two distinct aspects of faith: the Word particularly, but not exclusively, supports the true knowledge of faith while the sacraments specifically serve to strengthen the confidence of faith.

WHY DID GOD GIVES US MEANS OF GRACE?

"But with God all things are possible . . ." (Matt 19:26). That being the case, someone might ask, "Why doesn't God just work salvation in us directly, instantaneously, and *without any means*? Would that not be so much more efficient?" Moreover, this question becomes even more pressing when you consider that both the preaching of the gospel and the

administration of the sacraments are done by weak and sinful men. A preacher can make unwise or erroneous statements while he is preaching. Sometimes a sacrament is administered in a way that does not honour God or edify the congregation. So, with all this potential for weakness and error in the use of the means, why doesn't our Saviour circumvent all the risk and just work salvation in us directly?

To be sure, this would be efficient, and God's grace is certainly sovereign enough to save us without any means. However, it is important to distinguish between what God in his sovereignty is able to do and what God in his sovereign good-pleasure has chosen to do. As the Son of God made plain before his ascension, God has chosen to use certain means. Therefore, as the Canons of Dort remind us, we should remember our creaturely status and "not dare to tempt God by separating what he in his good pleasure has willed to be closely joined together" (CoD 3/4.17).

Still, in our curiosity we may wonder why God has chosen to do so. Being mindful of the truth that we ought not to "curiously inquire farther than our capacity allows us" (BC 13), we can suggest several reasons. In the first place, when God created all things and saw that they were "very good" (Gen 1:31), he also made those things for a purpose. For example, one of the purposes for which he made human beings, both male and female, was so that they would rule wisely over his creation (Gen 1:26). Now, of course, the Lord was more than able to rule over creation without using the human beings as his instruments or vice-regents, but it was his choice to rule through means. When we turn from the doctrine of creation to the doctrine of salvation, it should not surprise us that God continues to work in the same manner. He redeems through means just as he rules through instruments. Our God is consistent, also in the methods he uses to accomplish his mighty deeds.

Secondly, by using the preaching of the gospel our Redeemer slows down the process of salvation. That may sound strange, as if the Lord is purposefully dragging out our deliverance, but such is not the case. The simple point is this: God could take us from being wretched sinners (Rom 7:24) to enjoying the perfection of final glory (Rom 8:30) in an

instant. He is *that* powerful! However, that is not his regular, chosen way of working. Instead, his Spirit works faith in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel, and preaching takes time. Since preachers can convey only a limited part of the gospel at any given moment, it takes many sermons and much instruction to promote maturity in faith. Similarly, the Lord's supper is repeated many times over. To look at it from yet another angle, this more protracted method of cultivating faith also affords us the opportunity to appreciate the many delightful details of our Saviour's work. We are finite; we need time to absorb, understand, appreciate, and enjoy.

Again, a quick comparison to creation may help. Yes, the Lord could have created everything in an instant. However, he decided to do it over six days, which gives us time to absorb and appreciate the wonders of each day of creation. The use of means in salvation similarly opens up an opportunity for us to savour the details of salvation as the Lord takes us from calling and faith, to justification and sanctification, to perseverance and final glory.

Finally, someone might be concerned that since sinful men administer the means of grace, it is possible for God's grace to be compromised by man's sinfulness. We must not cover up the reality that preachers of the gospel are weak and fallible men. The apostle Paul himself was quick to admit this when he wrote, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom" (1 Cor 2:3–5). What was true of the apostle Paul is equally true of any preacher today. They are mere "jars of clay" (2 Cor 4:7) that make mistakes, not only in conduct (Acts 15:39) but also doctrine (Gal 2:11–14), at which point they need to be corrected. Yet, even when the motives of preachers are less than pure (Phil 1:15–18), the kingdom of Christ still advances. The weakness of men does not prevent the work of Christ from progressing (2 Tim 2:9).

In fact, rightly understood, the weaknesses of preachers actually bring greater glory to the Lord. It is already a miracle that God graciously saves sinners; it is a double miracle that he saves sinners using *other sin-*

ners to proclaim the good news to them. In this surprising way God's power is made perfect in human weakness (2 Cor 12:9), and in the end we are obliged to say, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory" (Ps 115:1). That is the way it should be.

THE MEANS OF GRACE ARE NOT GRACE ITSELF

By now it should be obvious that God's grace and his chosen means of grace are closely related to each other. This also raises the possibility, though, that people might confuse both of them, or even combine them. Such confusion must be carefully and consistently avoided in this doctrine. Otherwise any one of us might fall into serious spiritual misunderstandings.

For instance, the sacrament of baptism is a powerful way in which God assures us that we are washed clean from our sins by the blood of Christ. Thus, the apostle Peter proclaimed on Pentecost Day, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Now if a person forgets to distinguish between grace and means of grace, he might just conclude that so long as he is baptized he is eternally saved, regardless of whether he embraces holiness or decides to wallow in the mire of sin. Confusing, or conflating, grace itself with the means of grace may quickly turn the sacraments into some kind of spiritual vending machines. However, salvation is not automatically dispensed; rather, it is received out of grace through repentance and faith.

Turning to more proactive thoughts, how do we keep grace and the means of grace properly connected, yet not confused? To begin with, perhaps an analogy will help. More than once the Bible compares faith to plants, whether to a small grain of mustard seed (Matt 17:20) or to a field of wheat producing thirty, sixty, or even a hundredfold (Matt 13:8). With plants, we can easily distinguish between the plant itself and those things that help the plant grow (i.e., the means). There is the wheat, and then there is the rain that helps the wheat grow. There is the mustard seed, and then there is the farmer who plants the seed and fertilizes the grow-

ing tree. Neither the rain, nor the farmer, nor the fertilizer is the mustard tree, even though they all have a role to play in the growth of the plant.

Furthermore, even though a farmer plants a seed, this does not automatically mean there will be an abundant harvest, even if there is rain. The Parable of the Sower, perhaps better called the Parable of the Different Soils, illustrates this point (Matt 13:1–23). Some seeds fall on a hard path, or in rocky soil, or become choked by weeds. And, yes, some produce abundant crops. The Lord alone knows how each seed will develop. Yet one thing is clear: just as a seed does not automatically and inevitably produce a good harvest, so, too, a sermon or a sacrament does not automatically and inevitably produce saved sinners.

In this respect it is instructive to observe how things have developed within the Roman Catholic Church. Over time, the place of the sacraments has risen to such a height that the Roman Catholic Church itself says, “The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharist sacrifice and the sacraments.”² The seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, then, dispense or confer sacramental grace, to use this church’s terms. Moreover, “the sacraments act *ex opere operato*, literally: ‘by the very fact of the action’s being performed.’”³ Notice what is happening here. By saying that “the *sacraments* act,” the worshipper is left with the impression that the sacraments themselves contain a measure of saving grace. If the worshipper receives the sacrament, then by that very fact and action, grace is automatically received. In this teaching the means of grace and grace itself are being confused. By contrast, the Heidelberg Catechism keeps a proper distinction between the two when it states the following: “Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins? No, only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins” (LD 27, Q&A 72).

By the same token, a proper distinction should never grow to become a distant separation. As we saw above, the Canons of Dort offer this wise reminder: “So today those who give or receive instruction in the church

2. *A Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994) §1113.

3. *A Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1128.

should not dare to tempt God by separating what he in his good pleasure has willed to be closely joined together” (3/4.17). When the distinction becomes a separation, one of two results can occur, both of which are spiritually unhealthy.

The first result is that people begin to downplay the unique significance of the Word and the sacraments. For them, conversations with fellow believers are just as important as the preaching of the gospel. “After all,” they suggest, “preaching is a monologue, and we live in a world of dialogue.” Or the sacraments of baptism and Lord’s supper are overshadowed by various other ceremonies and activities, perhaps liturgical drama or musical performances. “After all,” some people say, “these other creative events do a lot to build me up in my faith.” Yet, remarkably, when we turn to Scripture we do not find God instructing leaders of the church to facilitate dialogues, stage dramas, or host musical groups. Rather, we find this clear command, “Preach the Word” (2 Tim 4:2; see also 1 Cor 2:20–25). As the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us, we should not attempt to be wiser than God; rather, we should be content with the means of grace that he has given to us (LD 35, Q&A 98).

The second, and more extreme, result is that the means of grace will not only be overshadowed by other activities but set off to the side entirely. This usually happens in more mystical, or perhaps charismatic, circles, where people long for direct messages and visions from God. Of course, the Almighty can communicate through visions, and he has certainly done so. Think only of the visions he gave to our forefather Abram (Gen 15:1) and the apostle Paul (2 Cor 12:1). But even though the Lord can do something, this does not mean that he makes it his regular way of communicating to people today. Whether it was John the Baptist (Matt 3:1), Jesus Christ himself (Matt 4:23), Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:11), or the apostles Peter and John (Acts 8:25), preaching was the manner in which God normally cultivated faith in people.

In short, then, the means of grace ought not to be elevated too highly, to the point that they become equated with grace itself. At the same time, they must not be demoted to a level at which they become mere

options or irrelevant obstacles. As John Calvin aptly said, “Although God’s power is not bound to outward means, he has nonetheless bound us to this ordinary manner of teaching.”⁴

HOW MANY MEANS OF GRACE ARE THERE?

In a sense we addressed this question already when we discovered that, just before his ascension, Christ shone the spotlight on two means of grace: the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments. Identifying these two as the instruments by which the Lord normally sustains faith is confirmed by the instructions of the apostle Paul (2 Tim 4:2) and the practice of the apostles and others as described in the book of Acts (see 8:11, 25, 40; 9:20, 27; 10:42; 14:7, 21, 25; 15:35 and numerous other passages).

All the same, it is good to touch on this topic once more, for there are also passages in the Bible where the church of Christ is greatly blessed by other activities. For example, in Acts 2:42 we learn that those who joined the post-Pentecost church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” The apostles’ teaching corresponds to the preaching of the gospel, and the breaking of bread certainly includes the sacrament of the Lord’s supper (see also Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor 10:16). So, if two of them are considered means of grace, why not the other two, namely, prayer and fellowship? Besides, prayer is certainly not an incidental part of the Christian life. In fact, all believers must be constant in prayer (1 Thess 5:17). Likewise, fellowship is at the heart of what it means to be a church of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 12:12–26). Therefore is it not permissible to expand our list of the means of grace to include such things as prayer, fellowship, and perhaps even communal singing (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16)?

Without diminishing whatsoever the value of such spiritual activities, the answer to this question revolves around the matter of direction. In prayer we clearly address our Father in heaven, offering up to him a sacrifice of thanksgiving along with our requests (Ps 141:2). The direction is from us

4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.1.5.

to him, from earth up to heaven. Similarly, in singing we offer praise to God as well as teach and admonish other members of the congregation (Col 3:16). So the direction is again from earth to heaven, as well as from believer across to fellow believer. Christian fellowship, also called the communion of the saints, involves the members of the body of Christ in giving and receiving Christian kindness. The direction is back and forth on the horizontal plane.

Within this context it is easy to see that the preaching of the Word and the sacraments involve a different direction. Both of them originate with the God of heaven, who sends out his ambassadors to us (2 Cor 5:20). They, in turn, appeal to us on Christ's behalf and administer the sacraments for us. In other words, the direction is from God to us, from heaven to earth. Grace flows in that same direction: from God to us. Therefore, although the Holy Spirit mentions four things side by side in Acts 2—preaching, sacraments, fellowship, and prayer—only two of them are called *means of grace*, because they align most closely with the heaven-to-earth direction.

To turn to one final matter, since the means of grace are oriented in the downward, God-to-us direction, they are an invaluable source of comfort and assurance for us. Our prayer life, fellowship, and singing may rise and fall in zeal and sincerity. Yet the Word of our God remains forever (Isa 40:8). Thankfully, since the Source and means of grace are divinely stable, our faith is solidly anchored (Heb 6:19).

Suggested Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:7–18

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. The means of grace are administered by weak and sinful men. If the weaknesses are relatively minor (e.g., if sermons show some lack of organization), we tend to say that the power of God is manifested in spite of the preacher's shortcomings. But is there a tipping point at which the peculiarities of the preacher actually undercut the power of the gospel? How do we deal with this?

2. Is reading the Bible a means of grace, or is it only the preaching of the gospel that qualifies for that designation? Why or why not?
3. In addition to “the administration of the Word” and “the sacraments,” the Canons of Dort also mention “discipline” (3/4.17). Is church discipline a means of grace? Why or why not?
4. Why are the sacraments such apt instruments for strengthening faith? If a brother or sister in the Lord is struggling with doubts, we often want to point to a Bible verse that answers the particular question they are wrestling with. How could we, in addition to Bible verses, use the sacraments?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. The introduction to this chapter described the sudden conversion of Paul and the gradual growth in faith of Timothy. Does a more dramatic intervention of God’s grace lead to a more sincere faith? Do those who grow up in the faith through the regular means of grace tend to take things for granted? Or do they develop a more well-rounded faith over time? Give reasons for your answers.
2. When someone’s faith is wavering, elders in the church will often recommend being diligent in attending the worship services. This is fully in line with the Canons of Dort 1.16. However, is this being too simplistic? Sometimes people who waver in faith feel like hypocrites when they join in worship. How do we help each other overcome that obstacle?
3. How should parents teach their children about baptism so that they do not grow up thinking that their baptism as such saves them but so that they also learn to use the faith-strengthening qualities that God has built into that sacrament? In as much concrete detail as you can, outline what you would, or would not, say to children.

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