

# The Right Use of Means

## The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification – Direction 13

*Direction 13:* Endeavour diligently to make the right use of all means appointed in the Word of God for the obtaining and practicing holiness only in this way of believing in Christ and walking in Him, according to your new state by faith.

*Thesis:* Use God's means to practice holiness in Christ by the life of faith.

### **I. The use of God's means for living the Christian life.**

- A. Faith in Christ does not negate the use of means, it establishes it.
  - 1. The means are gifts from God.
  - 2. True believers will find that they need such helps.
- B. The right manner of doing this is in our new state by faith.
  - 1. We can only use them properly as people united to Christ by faith.
  - 2. They are not ends to themselves but means to grow in your walk with Christ.

### **II. How to make use by faith of the several means given in Scripture**

#### **A. The Word of God**

- 1. We must endeavour diligently to know the Word of God contained in the Holy Scripture, and to improve it to this end that we may be made wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15).
- 2. You should learn the gospel principles that you are to walk by for the attainment of holiness in Christ. And here I shall mind you particularly that you would be a good proficient in Christian learning, if you get a good understanding of the sixth and seventh chapters of the apostle Paul to the Romans, where the powerful principles of sanctification are purposely treated of, and differenced from those weak and ineffectual principles, which we are most naturally prone to walk by.
- 3. Yet let me caution you lest, instead of gaining Christ by your knowledge, you rather lose Him by putting your knowledge in the place of Christ, and trusting on it for your salvation. One cause of the Jews perishing was that they rested in a form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law (Rom. 2:20). And, doubtless, all that many Christians will gain by their knowledge in the end will only be to be beaten with more stripes, because they place their religion and salvation chiefly in the knowledge of their Lord's will, and in their ability to talk and dispute it, without preparing themselves to do according thereunto (Luke 12:47).

#### **B. Self-Examination**

- 1. This is "...examination of our state and ways according to the Word, whether we be at present in a state of sin and wrath, or of grace and salvation."
- 2. Think not that you must begin this work with doubting whether God will extend mercy to you, and save you, and that you must leave this a question wholly under debate, until you have found out how to resolve it by self-examination. This is a common and very pernicious error in the very foundation of this work.
- 3. You should rather begin the work with much assurance of faith that, though you may at present find your heart never so wicked and reprobate (as many of God's choicest servants have found), yet the door of mercy is open for you, and that God will certainly save you forever, if you put your trust in His grace through Christ.
- 4. You should also examine the fruits of your faith, and try whether you can show your faith by your works, as you are taught (James 2:18), that you may be sure not to be deceived in your judgment concerning it.

5. Happy are you if you can find so much evidence of the fruits of your faith as may enable you to express your sincerity in these moderate terms: 'Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly' (Heb. 13:18).

### **C. Meditation**

1. Meditation "is a duty by which the soul does feed and ruminate upon the Word as its spiritual food, and digests it, and turns it into nourishment, by which we are strengthened for every good work. Our souls are satisfied therewith, as with marrow and fatness; when we remember God upon our beds, and meditate on Him in the night watches (Ps. 63:5, 6).
2. The new nature may well be called 'the mind' (Rom. 7:25), because it lives and acts by minding and meditating on spiritual things. Therefore, it is a duty to be practiced, not only at some limited times, but all the day (Ps. 119:97); yes, 'day and night' (Ps. 1:2), even in our ordinary employment at home and abroad.
3. A habitual knowledge of the Word will not profit us, without an active minding of it by frequent meditation.
4. But here our greatest skill and chiefest concernment lies in practicing this duty in such a manner as that it may be subservient, and not at all opposite to the life of faith. We must not rely upon the performance of a daily task of meditation as a work of righteousness for the procurement of the favour of God, instead of relying on the righteousness of Christ - as indeed we are prone to do, to catch at any straw, rather than to trust only on the free grace of God in Christ for our salvation.
5. And the end of our meditation must not be mere speculation and knowledge of the truth, but rather the vigorous pressing it upon our consciences, and the stirring up our hearts and affections to the practice of it.

### **D. Baptism**

1. Baptism must needs be of great use to promote the life of faith, if it be made use of according to its nature and institution, because it is a seal of the righteousness of faith, as circumcision was formerly (Rom. 4: 11).
2. But then we must take heed of making it a seal of the contrary righteousness of works, as the carnal Jews did, that sought to be justified by the law of Moses. [...] If you are baptized, so long as you continue in the abuse of that holy ordinance, 'Christ shall profit you nothing; Christ is become of none effect to you; you are fallen from grace' (Gal. 5:2, 4).
3. it is not sufficient to avoid the pernicious errors of those that pervert baptism, contrary to its institution; but you must be also diligent in improving it to the ends for which it was instituted. And here let me desire you to put the question seriously to your souls: 'What good use do you make of your baptism? How often, or seldom, do you think upon it?'
4. Though baptism be administered to us but once in our lives, yet we ought frequently to reflect upon it, and upon all occasions to put the question to ourselves: 'Unto what were we baptized?' (Acts 19:3.) What does this ordinance seal? What did it engage us to? And accordingly we must stir up and strengthen ourselves by our baptism to lay hold on the grace which it seals to us, and to fulfil its engagements. We should often remember that we are made Christ's disciples by baptism, and engaged to hear Him.

### **E. The Lord's Supper**

1. The Lord's Supper is as a spiritual feast to nourish our faith, and to strengthen us to walk in all holiness by Christ living and working in us, if it be used according to the pattern which Christ gave us in its first institution recorded by three evangelists (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19, 20), and was extraordinarily revealed from heaven by Christ Himself to the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 11:23-25), that we might be the more obliged and stirred up to the exact observation of it. Its end is not only that we may remember Christ's death in the history, but in the mystery of it: as that His body was broken for us, that His blood is the blood of the New Testament, or covenant, shed for us,

and for many, for the remission of sins, that so we may receive and enjoy all the promises of the new covenant which are recorded (Heb. 8:10-12).

2. Its end is to mind us that Christ's body and blood are bread and drink, even all-sufficient food to nourish our souls to everlasting life; and that we ought to take, and eat, and drink Him by faith; and to assure us that, when we 'truly believe on Him, He is as really and closely united to us by His Spirit, as the food which we eat and drink is united to our bodies'. Christ Himself (John 6) does more fully explain this mystery.
3. One reason why many do little esteem, and seldom or never partake of this ordinance, and do find little benefit by it, is because they falsely imagine that God in it only holds forth naked signs and resemblances of Christ and His salvation, which they account to be held forth so plainly in Scripture that they need not the help of such a sign; whereas if they understood that God does really give Christ Himself to their faith, by and with those signs and resemblances, they would prize it as the most delicious feast, and be desirous to partake of it on all opportunities (Acts 2:42; 20:7).
4. Another reason why many partake seldom or never of this ordinance, and know little of the benefit of it is because they think themselves brought by it into great danger of eating and drinking their own damnation, according to those terrifying words of the apostle: 'For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body' (1 Cor. 11:29). Therefore they account it the safest way, wholly to abstain from such a dangerous ordinance or, at least, that once a year is enough to run so great a hazard.
5. But there is no reason why we should be so much terrified by those words of the apostle; for they were darted against such a gross profanation of the Lord's Supper among the Corinthians as we may easily avoid by observing the institution of it which the apostle proposes to them as a sufficient remedy against the gross abuse, in not discerning or differencing the Lord's body from other bodily food, and partaking of it as their own supper, with such disorder that one was hungry and another drunken.

## **F. Prayer**

1. Prayer is to be made use of as a means of living by faith in Christ, according to the new man. And it is the making our requests with supplication and thanksgiving. That it is to be used so, as an eminent means, appears because God requires it (1 Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12); it is our priestly work (1 Peter 2:5; compared with Ps. 141:2); and the property of saints (1 Cor. 1:2); and God is a God of hearing prayer (Ps. 65:2). God will be prayed to by His people for the benefit that He is minded to bestow upon them, when once He has enabled them to pray, though at first He is found of them that seek Him not (Ezek. 36:37; Phil. 1:19, 20), that He may prepare them for thanksgiving and make benefits double benefits to them (Ps. 66:16, 18, 19; 50:15; 2 Cor. 1:10, 11). Though His will will not be changed by this means, yet it is accomplished ordinarily and His purpose is to accomplish it this way. And therefore, trusting assuredly should not make us neglect but rather perform this duty (2 Sam. 7:27).
2. Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, by whom justification and sanctification are promised, is also the Mediator for acceptance of our prayers (Heb. 4:15, 16). The Spirit that sanctifies us, begets us in Christ and shows the things of Christ to us, is a Spirit of prayer (Zech. 12:10; Gal. 4:6). He is as fire inflaming the soul, and making it to mount upward in prayer to God. Prayerless people are dead to God. If they are children of Zion, yet they are but stillborn, dead children, they cry not (Acts 9:11), not written among the living in Jerusalem; heathens in nature, though Christians in name (Jer. 10:25).
3. Rules for Prayer:
  - a. Pray with understanding in your inner man.
  - b. Pray in the Name of Christ.
  - c. Do not use prayer as a means of earning salvation or favor with God.
  - d. Pray in faith to God a Father through Christ as Savior and Mediator.

- e. Strive through Prayer to stir up the Grace of God given to you.
- f. Use Prayer to bring your soul in order.
- g. Use Prayer to keep you soul in order.
- h. Do not offer slavish prayers according to humanly pleasing forms.

## G. Sacred Music

1. Singing of psalms, that is, songs of any sacred subject composed to a tune, hymns or songs of praise and spiritual songs of any sublime spiritual manner, as Psalm 45 and the Song of Solomon. God has commanded it in the New Testament (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19), though now in these days many question whether it is an ordinance or not. And there were many commands for it under the Old Testament (Ps. 149:1-3; 96:1; 100).
2. The matter of Scripture may be sung (Ps. 119:54).
3. But the right manner of this duty is chiefly to be noted. And here,
  - a. (i) Trust not upon the melody of the voice, as if that pleased God, who delights only in the melody of the heart (Col. 3:16). Neither let the recreating your senses be your end, which is but a carnal work: Non musica chordula, sed cor; non clamans, sed amans, psallit in aure Dei: 'Not a musical string, but the heart; nor crying, but loving sounds in the ear of the Lord.' This spiritual music was typified by musical instruments of old.
  - b. (ii) You must use it for the same end as meditation and prayer, according to the nature of what is sung, that is, to quicken faith (2 Chron. 20:21, 22; Acts 16:25, 26), and joy and delight in the Lord, glorying in Him (Ps. 104:33, 34; 105:3; 149:1, 2; 33: 1-3).
  - c. You are never right until you can be heartily merry in the Lord, to act joy and mirth holily (James 5:13; Eph. 5:19), and also to get more knowledge and instruction in heavenly mysteries, and in your duty, teaching and admonishing (Col. 3:16).
  - d. Many psalms are Maschils (as their title is), that is, psalms of instruction.
4. Thus we are to sing such psalms as speak in the first person, though we cannot apply them to ourselves, as words uttered by ourselves concerning ourselves; and in this we do not lie.
5. Though it is good to personate all the good that we can, yet we have so much liberty in the use of psalms that though we cannot apply all to ourselves, as speaking and thinking the same, yet we shall answer the end if we sing for our instruction, as in Psalms 6, 26, 46, 101 and 131.

## H. Fasting

1. Fasting is also an ordinance of God to be used for the same purpose and end and is commended to us under the New Testament (Matt. 9:15 ;17:21 ; 1 Cor. 7:5). And we have examples of it (Acts 13:2, 3; 14:23 ). Under the Old Testament there were frequent commands for it and examples, chiefly upon occasion of extraordinary afflictions (1 Sam. 7:6; Neh. 9:1; Dan. 9:3; 10:2, 3; 2 Sam. 12: 16; Ps. 35:13; 2 Sam. 3:31, 35; Joel 2:12, 13); besides the anniversary great day of atonement (Lev. 16: 29, 31), when everyone was to fast on pain of being cut off. There is a prophecy of the same for the times of the New Testament (Zech. 12:12 ). It was used most on extraordinary occasions, and it is a help to holiness by faith, because it is a meet help for extraordinary prayer and humiliation (Joel 1:14; 2:12).
2. Use it rightly:
  - a. Trust not in it as meriting or satisfying, as Papists and Pharisees do (Luke 18:12), putting it in the place of Christ; or as a means of itself conferring grace and mortifying lusts, as many do, who may sooner kill their bodies than their lusts; or as any purifying rite; yea, or in or for itself acceptable to God (1 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 13:9; Col. 2:16, 17, 20, 23).
  - b. Use it as a help to extraordinary prayer and humiliation, that the mind may not be unsuited for it by eating, drinking or bodily pleasures (Joel 2:13; Isa. 22:12, 13; Zech. 12:10-14). It is good only as a help to the soul, removing impediments. The best fast is when the mind is taken off from

delights, as in John the Baptist's case (Matt. 3:4), when heaven and godly sorrow take off the soul (Zech. 12:10-14).

- c. Use it in such a measure as may be proper for its end, without which it is worth nothing. If abstinence divert your mind, by reason of a gnawing appetite, then you had better eat sparingly, as Daniel in his great fast (Dan. 10:2, 3). Some have not enough of spiritual-mindedness to give up themselves to fasting and prayer without great distraction; and such had better eat than go beyond their strength in a thing not absolutely necessary, which produces only a slavish act, as in the case of virginity (1 Cor. 7:7-9, 34-36). Christ would not have His weak disciples necessitated to the duty (Matt. 9:14, 15). In the meantime, such should strive to be sensible of the weakness and carnality that hinders their use of this excellent help.

## **I. The Danger of Vows**

You may expect here something to be spoken of vows. But I shall only say this of them. Think not to bring yourselves to good by vows and promises, as if the strength of your own law could do it when the strength of God's law does it not. We bring children to make promises of amendment, but we know how well they keep them. The devil will urge you to vow, and then to break, that he may perplex your conscience the more.

## **J. Fellowship; the Communion of the Saints (Acts 2:42)**

1. Firstly, in general, because God communicates all salvation to a people ordinarily by, or in a church, either by taking them into fellowship, or holding forth the light of truth by His churches to the world. A church is the temple of God, where God dwells (1 Tim. 3:15). He has given to His churches those officers and ordinances whereby He converts others (1 Cor. 12:28). He makes the several members of a church instruments for the conveyance of His grace and fullness from one to another, as the members of the natural body convey to each other the fullness of the head (Eph. 4:16). All the newborn are brought forth and nourished by the church (Isa. 66:8, 11; 49:20; 60:4), and therefore all that would be saved should join to a church; they shall prosper that love the church, so as to stand in its gates and unite as members, brethren and companions (Ps. 122:2, 4, 6). And wrath is denounced against those that are not members of it, at least, of the mystical body: they cannot have God for their Father, that have not that for their mother (S. of S. 1:7, 8). This makes those that desire fellowship with God to take hold of the skirts of His people (Zech. 8:23).
2. Secondly, in particular, fellowship with the saints conduces to holiness many ways.
  - a. By manifold helps to holiness, which are received thereby, as:
    - (1) The Word and sacraments (Acts 2:42; Isa. 2:3; Matt. 28:19, 20), and all the ministerial office and labour in watching our souls (Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12, 13; Isa. 25: 6). None of these helps can be enjoyed without fellowship of saints, each with other. And if believers had been to have stood single by themselves, and not maintained fellowship with each other for mutual assistance and common good, none of these things could have continued.
    - (2) Mutual prayer, which is the more forcible when all pray together (Matt. 18:19, 20; 2 Cor. 1:10, 11; James 5:16; Rom. 15:30).
    - (3) Mutual admonition, instruction, consolation, to help each other when they are ready to fall, and to promote the good work in each other (1 Thess. 5:14). 'He that walks with wise men, shall be wise' (Prov. 13:20). Woe to him that is alone 'when he falls' (see Eccles. 4:9-12). In church fellowship there are many helpers, many to watch. Soldiers have their security in company, and the church is compared to an 'army with banners' (S. of S. 6:4, 10). So, for quickening affections, iron sharpens iron (Prov. 27:17). Likewise, the counsel of a friend, like ointment and perfume, rejoices the heart (Prov. 27:9), yea, the wounds and reproofs of the righteous are as precious balm (Ps. 141:5).
    - (4) External supports, which mitigate afflictions, and are to be communicated mutually (Eph. 4:28; 1 Peter 4:9, 10). The affliction is increased, when none care for our souls (Ps. 142:4).

- (5) Excommunication, when offences are exceeding heinous or men obstinate in sin. This ordinance is appointed for the 'destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved' (1 Cor. 5:5). Better and more hopeful it is to be cast out by the church for a person's amendment than to be wholly without the church at all times; and better to be a lost sheep, than a goat or swine; for excommunication cuts off actual communion only until repentance be evident, and not absolutely abolishes the title and relation of a brother and church member, though it judges one to be an unnatural brother and a pernicious rotten member at present, not fit for acts of communion. Besides, admonition is still to be afforded (2 Thess. 3:15), and any means are to be used that may serve to cure and restore him. The church reaches forth a hand to help such a person, though it does not join hands in fellowship with him; or it communicates to him, not with him. Yet, if he have not so much grace as to repent, it were better he had never known the way of righteousness (2 Peter 2:21).
  - (6) The lively examples of saints are before our eyes in church fellowship, to teach and encourage (Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Tim. 3: 10, 11; 2 Cor. 9:2).
- b. By the performance of the duties that pertain to fellowship and communion:
- (1) Godly discourse, teaching, admonishing, comforting others in Christ, which we cannot so perform towards others as towards those we have strict fellowship with in Christ. Others, like swine, trample these jewels under foot, and saints therefore are forced to refrain from godly discourse in their company (Amos 5:10, 13; 6:10). But holy discourse is most acceptable to the saints, and to be practiced with them (Mal. 3:16), and is greatly to the advantage of holiness (Prov. 11:25).
  - (2) In helping, succouring and conversing with Christ in His members. We do good to Christ in His members in church fellowship; and we ourselves as members of Christ act as well from Christ as towards Christ; whereas, if we do good to others without, we do good only for Christ's sake, but not to Christ (Matt. 25:35-46; Ps. 16:2, 3). We have advantage in general to do all duties that belong to us as members of Christ to fellow members - which we cannot do, if separate from them, as a natural member cannot perform its office to other members, if separate from them.

### **III. How to use the means rightly for attaining holiness**

- A. Do not trust in church membership or in churches.
- B. Follow no church farther than you can follow it in the way of Christ.
- C. Do not think you must attain to the way of grace before you join.
- D. Keep communion with a church for the sake of Christ.
- E. Do not leave the church during times of persecution and suffering for that is the time when you need it most.