

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or more questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to oakhillpca.com/wsc

Q. 86. *What is faith in Jesus Christ?*

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.

Question 85 outlined what the rest of the Shorter Catechism will focus on: how do we escape the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin? God requires three things: faith, repentance, and the diligent use of the means of grace. While explaining these three responsibilities, the Catechism is careful to highlight the nature of grace behind each. Our salvation is not of works.

Ephesians 2:8-9 explains that faith is a saving grace. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." In the Greek, nouns have gender (i.e. masculine, feminine, neuter). Pronouns need to match the gender of the noun to which they refer. Both "grace" and "faith" are feminine nouns. The pronouns "this" and "it" are neuter. Greek uses the neuter pronoun when referring to more than a single word, like a phrase. So, when Paul says, "This is not your own doing," he is speaking about the entire first phrase, "by grace you have been saved through faith." Even our faith is not our own doing. It is the gift of God.

Acts 13:48 affirms this reality. We read, "As many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Faith is the noun form of the verb believe. So, the Bible affirms these two truths: God requires faith and our faith is a gift from God.

Question 86 focuses on the nature of faith and uses two words that are incredibly helpful: receive and rest.

1. Receive Christ alone for salvation. To have faith is like receiving a gift. A gift we do not deserve, nor should we expect. In the Gospel, God offers forgiveness of our sins and the hope of eternal life. Faith is receiving that gift as our only hope of salvation from sin.

2. Rest in Christ alone for salvation. The word "rest" is critical for understanding faith. If we understand faith as merely "receiving" the gift, we may be tempted to think we can receive the gift, toss it to the side, and look for another gift. The word rest communicates that faith is satisfied with Christ and no longer looks for an alternative. Christ is sufficient for all of our needs and faith recognizes and rests in that sufficiency.