

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. 88. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Q. 85 asked how "we may escape God's wrath and curse, due to us for sin." Qs. 86-107 of the Catechism unpack the answer to that all-important matter. God requires faith (Q. 86), repentance (Q. 87), and the "diligent use" of the means of grace (Qs. 88-107). Now, the Catechism is not merely asking about a "ticket-out-of-hell" escape, but relief from the daily effects of the curse on sin. God, in his mercy and grace, wants to give us not only the promise of eternal life, but also the promise of "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) right now. We receive this gracious gift through faith, repentance, and the diligent use of the means of grace.

Q. 88 asks what the means of grace are. In a nutshell, the means of grace are the channels, or avenues, by which God gives us his grace, the "benefits of redemption." God has established (i.e. ordained... "his ordinances") specific ways that Christians can enjoy his grace. Q. 88 does not give a full list of these specific ways, but highlights three: "the Word, sacraments, and prayer" (WCF 21 gives a fuller list of the means, which includes "solemn fastings"). The rest of the Catechism unpacks how the Word, sacraments, and prayer give us God's grace. For now, let's focus on two words in the Q. 88 answer: communicates and effectual.

The word "communicate" normally carries a meaning of transferring information. So, in this brief article, I use words to transfer to you information and meaning about the Shorter Catechism. I strive to communicate clearly so that you may be able to receive the information easily. This is a part of the role of the means of grace: transfer of information about the benefits of redemption.

"Communicate" also means, however, passing along something to another. So, we can "communicate" a disease to another. This is not merely a transfer of information. The means of grace communicate the benefits of redemption to us, meaning they actually pass to us all the riches of God's grace, like a good infection.

These means "are made effectual" by God. God has chosen to use the Word, sacraments, and prayer to pass his grace to Christians. The effectiveness of the means does not rest on us, but on God. Therefore, we can be confident of receiving grace when we make "diligent use" of the means.