

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. 89. How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

A. The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Q. 90. How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?

A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

The Word of God is one of the primary means of grace. Paul says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable..." (2 Tim. 3:16). The writer of Hebrews says, "The word of God is living and active..." (Heb. 4:12). Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3 when he confronts Satan by saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). And the Psalmist celebrates, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119: 103, 105).

The Bible is the most unique book on earth as it is God's word. The Catechism asks how this divine book is "made effectual" for our salvation. The answer lies in the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul commands in Ephesians 6:17, "take... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." This teaches us that the Holy Spirit works in and through God's word. The Spirit guided the writing of Scripture (2 Pet. 1:21). The Spirit enables us to understand God's word (1 Cor. 2:12-13). The Spirit uses the word to awaken faith (Rom. 10:17). The Spirit is promised by Christ to be a Helper (Jn. 14:16), convict the world of sin, and guide into all truth (Jn. 16:8, 13). It is by the power of the Spirit that we abound in hope (Rom. 15:13). All of the ministry of the Spirit is in and through the Scriptures. He does not operate apart from the Word of God.

Without the Spirit, the Word of God is not effectual in our lives. So, Q. 90 basically asks how we may "walk by the Spirit" in order to receive the effectual means of the grace of Scripture. "Diligence, preparation, and prayer" direct our attention to the need for mindfulness of our inadequacy for receiving grace from Scripture. The Spirit must work in us and through Scripture to bring grace to us. Receiving the Word "with faith and love" expresses the hope for grace that comes by the Word.

John Piper uses the acronym I O U S to teach a pray of dependence as we come to read and hear God's word. "Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain" (Ps. 119:36). "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Ps. 119:18). "Unite my heart to fear your name" (Ps. 86:11). "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love" (Ps. 90:14).