

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations

○ STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

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

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

Scripture References: Matt 28:19, 20. Acts 2:41, 42.

Questions:

1. Who communicates these benefits to the believers and what are these benefits?
Christ communicates these benefits for such is His responsibility. These benefits are everything that Christ purchased for the elect both here and forever.
2. How are these benefits communicated to the believers?
These benefits are communicated to the believers through mediation by Christ as He works through the ordinances.
3. Why do we call the benefits of redemption "His ordinances?"
They are called His ordinances because He instituted them in His Word and He is the Head of the Church.
4. Why does this Question state "especially the word, sacraments, and prayer. . . ?"
These three are stated because they are the chief outward means of communicating the benefits of redemption. This is taught in Acts 2:42. It does not mean that the other means are not important. It simply means these are more important.
5. Why are these called "outward means"?
They are called outward means to distinguish them from the inward means such as faith and repentance, those mighty inward means of the Holy Spirit.
6. What do we mean by "salvation" in this Question?
By salvation in this Question is meant the complete doctrine of salvation. It means the beginning of deliverance from sin; the possession of new life and its resulting happiness in this life; the living unto God day by day; the blessedness which is to come when the believer gets to glory.

THE MEANS OF GRACE

When we hear these words, we are to think immediately of the Word, the sacraments and prayer. We do not think of them as the Roman Catholic Church thinks of them, that of rites which have the power to confer grace. Rather, the Reformed Faith has always thought of them as those means appointed by God for the purpose of conveying grace. The manner of conveying the grace comes through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The difficulty for the believer always comes when he does not make the proper use of the means of grace. Whether by disuse, or whether by a lack of use, the resulting effect will be a life that is not pleasing to the Lord. It is especially true in this day of the church that a proper use of the means of grace be made. Peter writes, "That ye may be mindful (care for) of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts." (II Peter 3:2, 3). The time has come when believers must make a proper use of the means of grace in this day of apostasy in the church.

How can we best make use of the means of grace? First, we must be persuaded that it is important that we know them and make use of them. We must realize they come from God, that their efficacy depends solely on God, not on man nor the church. This is one of the greatest dangers facing us today, this false view of the means of grace.

Second, we must prepare ourselves for their use in us. We cannot expect God to work in unprepared hearts, hearts that are harboring sin. We must prepare ourselves for their use by saying with Paul, "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world." (Titus 2:12)

Third, we must make use of the means of grace. To make use of them we must use them! We should ever study the Word, making sure that each day finds us giving time to it. We should never miss an opportunity to partake of the Lord's Supper and we should always keep our covenant vows made at baptism. We should pray without ceasing, knowing full well that a life void of prayer will be a fruitless life.

May God help us to recognize the means of grace as essential to our spiritual well-being!

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