

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 89. How is the word made effectual to salvation?

A. The Spirit of God maketh 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.

Scripture References: Psalm 19:7. Psalm 119:130. Thessalonians 1:6. Romans 1:16. Romans 16:25. Acts 20:32.

Questions:

1. What do we mean by the "word" in this question and how is it made effectual?

We mean by the "word" the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, that revelation of God. It is made effectual through its preaching but also its reading.

2. How is the word of God to be read?

Our Larger Catechism Question No. 157 tells us, "The Holy Scriptures are to be read with a high and reverend esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God; and that he only can enable us to understand them."

3. Who has the right to preach the Word of God?

Those who are called of God to preach the Word (I Timothy 4:14) and who have been given gifts by God (Malachi 2:7).

4. How should the Word of God be Preached?

Again our Larger Catechism tells us in Question 159, ". . . to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom . . . faithfully, . . . wisely, . . . zealously, . . . sincerely . . .".

5. Why is the Word of God called the "Primary means of Grace" by the Reformed Faith?

It is so called because the Bible states it is. When the Word is preached, souls are saved and brought up in the faith, according to the Bible.

6. How are sinners converted and built up in the faith by the preaching of the Word?

Sinners are converted and built up in the faith by the Spirit as the Word is preached. He opens their eyes, turns them from darkness into light and then begins the work of sanctification in them.

THE EFFECTUAL WORD—TO BE HEARD!

The man who is called to preach the Word of God has at least one consolation in the midst of a difficult and trying life: the Word, the preaching of it, is effectual! God has so promised in His Word. Paul speaks in I Thessalonians 2:13 of “. . . the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” The Word of God is also effectual to men’s condemnation. It will either lead men to Christ or lead them to condemnation if they refuse to believe. One of the Puritans used to say, “Dreadful is their case who go loaded with sermons to hell.” The Word of God is “quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword” and we can praise Him for it.

There is going about in this world today a false belief. This belief, that seems to be propagated more by men than women, is that one can be just as good a Christian not going to church as one can be in the church. Time and time again we hear this statement made by those who profess to be Christians. The argument is that it is not really necessary to be in church every time the Word is preached. This is indeed one of the most subtle lies of the devil! “How shall they hear without a preacher” is still in the Bible and is just as true and important as any other verse. The exhortation to not forsake assembling ourselves together is still in the Bible. And yet men persist in thinking they can live a good Christian life apart from the preaching and teaching of the Word.

In addition to what the Bible states regarding this matter, there is still another proof that is very plain. Any minister of the Gospel will tell you which of his members, with few exceptions, will be the ones with the following characteristics: (1) Willing workers in the Lord’s vineyard; (2) Always willing to teach and witness; (3) Able to handle problems that come to them in their lives. The members with these characteristics are those who are faithful to attend upon the teaching and preaching of the Word. They are God’s faithful ones, they are those whom He calls on time and time again to do His work. They are the families, with few exceptions, whose children are truly brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The Word is effectual and all of us have the awesome responsibility to take heed to it, to always be present when it is taught or preached. God will do great and mighty things in us and through us when we are faithful in this regard.

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