

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. 91. *How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?*

A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that does administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.

Q. 92. *What is a sacrament?*

A. A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ; wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.

Q. 93. *Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?*

A. The sacraments of the New Testament are, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

The Catechism is discussing how we can "escape the wrath and curse due to us for sin" (Q. 85). In other words: How can I be saved? How can I enjoy the salvation offered in Christ? The answer? Faith. Repentance. And the "diligent use" of the means of grace. The sacraments are a part of the means of grace.

Q. 91 asks how the sacraments help us "escape the wrath and curse." The Catechism is careful to point out that the power of the sacraments to effect salvation for us does not lie in the elements of the sacrament (i.e. water of baptism or the bread and wine of communion), nor in the minister who administers the sacrament. The power lies in Christ's design and the working of the Spirit.

The definition of a sacrament in Q. 92 helps us better understand how the sacraments are effectual for our salvation. They are "sensible signs" that represent, seal, and apply to believers "Christ and the benefits of the new covenant." Those three words, represent, seal, and apply, are important words.

1. Sacraments Represent Christ and the Benefits of the New Covenant. They are symbolic. They point us to the realities of what Christ has promised to do for us in the new covenant, namely, forgiveness of sin, a new heart for God's law, and intimate fellowship with God (see. Jer. 31:33-34). So, the sacraments help us "see" and think about the benefits of the new covenant.

2. Sacraments Seal Christ and His Benefits to Us. A seal is a confirmation and assurance that God will uphold his promises in the covenant. The sacraments are gifts to believers to assure us of God's effectual grace on our behalf.

3. Sacraments Apply Christ and His Benefits to Us. 1 Corinthians 10:16 says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" We enjoy the new covenant fellowship with Christ through the sacraments.

Keep in mind that the benefits of the sacraments are not enjoyed apart from faith. A. 91 calls us to receive them by faith.