

## THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

HAVING SEEN WHAT THE SCRIPTURES PRINCIPALLY TEACH US CONCERNING GOD, IT  
FOLLOWS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY REQUIRE AS THE DUTY OF MAN

### QUESTIONS # 161 & 91.

*(Larger Catechism)*

Q #161. *How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?*

A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted.<sup>1</sup>

*(Shorter Catechism)*

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 doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ,<sup>2</sup> and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.<sup>3</sup>

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Question 1—*What do we mean by “means of salvation”?*

*Answer*—A means of salvation is any appointment by Jesus Christ, the Head and King of His church, in the use of which salvation is begun, carried on and perfected, Acts 2:37, 38; 1 Cor. 10:16. Effectual means are those which, by the blessing of God, attain the end for which they are appointed, 1 Thess. 2:13.

The difference between the Word of God as a means of salvation and the sacraments as means of salvation consists in several things: 1.) The Word of God is designed as a means of grace for both believers and unbelievers, Rom. 1:16; but the sacraments are means with respect to believers alone, Ex. 12:48. 2.) The Word is designed to convict and convince sinners, Heb. 4:12; the sacraments are for confirming and comforting the saints, Rom. 15:8. 3.) The Word must precede the sacraments, Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:14-16, 38; because they work by faith and faith is wrought by the Word, Rom. 10:17.

The sacraments are designated not only as means, but they are effectual means of salvation to all whom they concern, Tit. 3:5. This is verified in the experience of many who hold sensible communion with Christ in the breaking of the bread, Luke 24:30, 31, 35.

Question 2—*Do the sacraments possess any virtue in themselves?*

*Answer*—No, Acts 8:13, 23. The sacraments of themselves have no virtue or efficacy to confer, or effect, salvation, being only among those outward and ordinary means by which the benefits of redemption are communicated to sinners, 1 Pet. 3:21.

This clause is inserted in opposition to those, like the Romish party, who hold that the sacraments of the New Testament are the true, proper and immediate causes of grace *ex opera operato*, 1 Cor. 5:7; and that the efficacy of them flows from the sacramental action of receiving the external elements, Mark 16:16. They are not to be considered converting ordinances but sealing ordinances, Rom. 4:11.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 8:13, 23; 1 Cor. 3:6, 7; 12:13.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. 3:21; Matt. 3:11; 1 Cor. 3:6, 7.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 12:13.

Question 3—*Are the sacraments rendered effectual by any virtue in the administrator?*

*Answer*—No, the best of men cannot render efficacious any Divine ordinance which can be administered by them, 1 Cor. 10:1-5; nor was this ever designed to be the case, 1 Cor. 3:6, 7.

The Roman church also maintains that the efficacy of the sacraments depends upon the will of the priest who dispenses them, and is communicated or withheld just as he intends or purposes at the time of administration, 1 Cor. 3:5. God has not suspended our salvation upon the precarious volitions of other men, over whom we have no power, Acts 1:17. But were this the case, it could not be known whether the sacraments would be accompanied with any benefit at all, because none can be absolutely certain about the intention of another, for the secrets of the heart are known to God alone, Acts 1:24.

Question 4—*How are the sacraments rendered effectual to salvation?*

*Answer*—The sacraments derive their efficacy:

*First*, from the blessing of Christ, Matt. 26:26-28. Without this, or without the divine life and power with which he has promised to accompany the sacraments, they are but a dead letter in themselves, John 6:33; having no life, until the spirit and life be put within them by Him who taketh the things of Christ and showeth them unto us, John 16:15. Furthermore, we know that the Spirit of Christ will not bless those means which lack his blessing, Matt. 15:9.

*Second*, the sacraments derive their efficacy from the working of Christ's Spirit, Matt. 3:11. By this we are to understand, not his work in implanting grace in the soul in a day of effectual calling, which is also his work, Ezek. 36:25-27; but particularly his calling forth this implanted grace into lively exercise when the sacraments are dispensed, John 3:5. And when the graces of the Spirit are thus drawn forth into lively exercise, and fixed on the objects exhibited in the sacraments, Rom. 6:3-6; then the Spirit may be said to work in them that receive them, 1 Cor. 12:13. The sacraments are made effectual by the operation of the Spirit of God, John 6:63.

Question 5—*To whom are the sacraments rendered effectual to salvation?*

*Answer*—The sacraments are effectual means of salvation to those only who receive them by faith, Acts 22:16; to those only who apply to themselves those things which are exhibited in them, Acts 16:29-33; or Christ and the benefits of his redemption, 1 Cor. 11:29.

This teacheth us, therefore, to cry earnestly for Christ's presence in the sacraments, Song 4:6; and to beware of resting in these sacraments as if they were possessed of some virtue despite the spiritual estate of the recipients, Ps. 101:2. Again, to receive the sacraments by faith is to apply Christ and the benefits of his purchase as represented and exhibited to us in them, Luke 22:19, 20. Thus, we are warned that men enjoying all the ordinances of the gospel and partaking of the sacraments annexed to the covenant of grace may yet perish forever, Luke 13:26, 27. It is with the sacraments as it is with the word, Heb. 4:2.

Nonetheless, in the right use of the sacraments, the effects are both lively and evident, Acts 8:38, 39. Their efficacy appears in these two things: 1.) The soul's cleaving more closely to the hope of the covenant than before, going out of itself more to Jesus Christ and his righteousness, which is the evidence of its oblation, or act of ratifying, Phil. 3:3. 2.) More solid tenderness with respect to sin and duty, and longing to be rid of the body of sin and death, of which this is a sign of its application, Rom. 6:4; 8:23.