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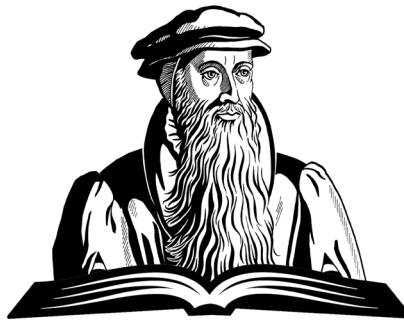
*Shorter*  
**CATECHISM**

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

*by Rev. Jonathan Mattull*

Lecture #47

**Means of Grace:**  
**The Word of God**  
*Catechism Questions 89 and 90*



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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*by Rev. Jonathan Mattull*

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# *The Shorter CATECHISM*

## VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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### Lecture #47

## Means of Grace: The Word of God

**Question 89:** *How is the word made effectual to salvation?*

**Answer:** *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.*

**Question 90:** *How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?*

**Answer:** *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 practise it in our lives.*

We continue our study of the Shorter Catechism, and we're in the section of the way of escaping God's wrath and curse. In particular, we're focusing on the means of grace—those ordinances which Christ has instituted to convey to us, to give to us the blessings of salvation. In this lesson, we look particularly at how Christ uses the Word of God. And we'll take up two Questions for our lesson, #89 and #90.

Now, for background, remember an earlier Question, #2, "What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?" And the Answer, which you'll remember, is, "The Word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him." Well, this is the background, and this helps us understand what is meant by "the Word of God." It's directing us to the revelation of God himself as he's given it to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Well, the Questions now are #89 and #90.

Question #89: "How is the word made effectual to salvation?" Now remember, the word "effectual" means, how it brings to pass its purpose. "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."

There's not much here that's too difficult, as far as terms or words. And the Answer is explaining that God, the Holy Spirit causes the Word of God, in its reading and preaching, to save sinners. "To convince" is to make one aware of and agree with. "To convert" means to turn them from one who

is at rebellion with God to one who is now trusting in God. And notice particularly the expression that it is “the reading, but especially the preaching of the word.” By “reading,” of course, includes both our personal reading of God’s Word, or when we’re with others and they’re reading it, or as well, when we’re in public worship and the minister reads the Word. The Spirit uses this to bring saving blessings to his people. And additionally, the Catechism highlights the preaching. Notice, “especially the preaching of the word.” Remember that Paul exhorted Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4:2, to “preach the word.” This is why the minister is to preach God’s Word, because when he does so faithfully and accurately, God’s Word is going forth with clarity to the hearer. And this preaching of God’s Word is especially used of God to bring about salvation. Paul indicates this in Romans, chapter 10. Notice verses 13 and 14, as well as verse 17, and you can read the whole chapter and see this more clearly: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” And verse 17: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” So there in Romans 10, Paul is highlighting especially the preaching of the Word, as the means that God uses to convert people unto himself. So remember, it’s both the reading and preaching of God’s Word that the Spirit uses.

Well, Question #90 is, “How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?” The words “read” and “hear” are here before us. How should it be read? How should we read it? And how should we hear it? How should it be heard—both what is publically read and publically preached? “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 practise it in our lives.”

The previous answer explained that is a sovereign, gracious work of the Spirit to save sinners by the reading and preaching of his Word. This Answer explains the right way we are to approach and use the Word of God. We can think of these two answers as twin truths. When the Spirit blesses his Word, he’s causing his people to receive it with faith and love. Additionally, it’s right for us to show reverence to so noble a gift, namely, the Scriptures. And to do so, we should prepare ourselves, and seek to see our lives changed by it.

Well, let’s look more deeply at this, in looking at three points. Firstly, The Cause of Blessing by the Word of God; secondly, The Effect of Blessing by the Word of God; and third, The Pursuit of Blessing by the Word of God.

So first, The Cause of Blessing by the Word. The Word of God itself is of immeasurable value. It is God’s very word. Yet, such is the wickedness, the blindness, and the corruption of man, that merely reading God’s Word will not bless us. We’ll resist it. We seek to set it aside, or to go so far, but not all the way with God’s Word. The Scriptures show us this in many places. You can think, for instance, of what is said of Christ’s ministry to the Jews, in John, chapter 1, and verse 11: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” What an astounding statement that is! Christ came and preached the truth, and yet his own covenant people resisted it, they refused it.

Well, how then will anyone ever be blessed by the reading and preaching of God’s Word? And the answer before us is, it’s by the sovereign and gracious work of God’s Spirit. It’s not the wisdom of man, the preacher. It’s not the wisdom of man, the hearer. It’s the gracious power of God the Spirit. Paul expresses this in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 5 and 6. He writes, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy

of the Holy Ghost.” Notice, it didn’t come in word only—preaching and reading, but in power, and that by the Holy Spirit. This is how sinners are converted. The Word is the instrument that the Spirit uses, but the Spirit must be at work using it, or men remain dead in their sins.

Now this is not only true for the unconverted. The believer needs God’s Spirit to bless God’s Word to him as well. So once one is converted, by God’s grace, if ever that one should benefit and grow by the reading or preaching of the Word, there’s the need for the same Spirit to be at work by the same Word. We can see this in Paul’s prayer recorded in Ephesians 1, verse 15 through 18: “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,” and so on. Notice, Paul is writing to those at Ephesus who believed in Christ. The Spirit had already brought them to believe upon Christ. And yet, Paul didn’t say, “Well, now you’re fine; you have God’s Word.” But rather, he didn’t stop praying for them, that what would happen? That God, by his Spirit, would open their minds further, and cause them to receive the truth. So what we see is, the blessing of God’s Word is caused by God’s grace. As the Spirit works powerfully to give understanding and faith to receive the truth. What a blessed truth it is that God gives us this great gift.

Well, second, from the cause, we look now to The Effect of Blessing by the Word. What happens when the Spirit uses the Word of God effectually in someone’s life? Well, the Catechism hopefully focuses us on the main things. Toward unconverted sinners, the Spirit convinces and converts them. To be convinced means that they are brought to agree with it, and they’re persuaded of the truth of it.

Notice, it’s a special work of the Spirit to use the Word to this end. Christ spoke of the Spirit’s ministry, in John 16, verses 7 through 11. He said, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” Christ is telling the apostles, as he’s preparing them for his ascension, that he’s going to provide a great help—another Comforter; another one alongside them. It’s the Spirit of truth, as he goes on to say in this chapter. Well, it’s the Spirit of God who then reproves and brings about conviction. He uses the ministry of the apostles and their writings—the Word of God—but it’s the Spirit who brings about the conviction and conversion. We say this earlier, in 1 Thessalonians. It wasn’t the Word only, but the Word by the Spirit which converted the Thessalonians. And here, Christ is showing us why, because the Spirit, when he’s using the Word, convinces, and reproves, and persuades them of the truth—these fundamental things. So it’s the Spirit who uses the Word. And when he uses the Word powerfully, what does he do? He brings about conviction.

We’re told in Psalm 19:7, of the Word of God, that it “is perfect, converting the soul.” What a blessed way that the Spirit uses the Word. Paul said, in Romans 10, as we read, “Faith cometh by hearing.” Hearing what?—“the word of God.” And so conversion is one effect of the Spirit’s use of the Bible. And so, when the Bible is read and preached, and the Spirit’s at work in an unconverted one, he’s bringing them to be convinced of the truth of God’s Word. But he’s also bringing that unconverted one to be converted to embrace that Word. This is the mighty work of God. We noted, as mentioned, Romans 10—it’s there we read that “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the



word of God.” This is an important point, because Paul, in context, is speaking about preaching. And so you saw that earlier, that there must be a preacher who goes and preaches. And Paul’s saying, it’s preaching particularly that the Spirit loves to use, to give faith. And so, when it is that the preaching goes forth, and the Spirit blesses it, he blesses unconverted ones with the gift of faith, as Paul says, in Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith.” And then he goes on to say, this is not your doing, it’s not your works, it’s not of your works. Rather, “by grace are ye saved through faith.”

Well, what about toward those who have believed? What are the effects of God’s Spirit’s use of the Word then? To those who have believed, the Spirit uses the Word to build them up, as the Catechism says, “in holiness and comfort.” To be built up in holiness is to be sanctified. To be built up in comfort is to be assured. Now, there are many passages that speak of this, but if you look at John 17:17, you’ll see Christ praying, and as he prayed, he included this very beautiful request, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” So, Christ is asking the Father for this great blessing to his people. And how is it that the Father would bring about this sanctifying of them, the purifying of them, the building of them up in holiness and comfort? It’s by God’s Word. So as God blesses the Word by the ministry of his Spirit, his people are sanctified. You’ll remember Paul’s prayer in Ephesians, that he was praying that the eyes of their understanding would be opened, that they would know the will of God, and the riches of comfort that are theirs in Christ. And so, when it is that God is blessing his Word by the Spirit to his people, they will be convinced of sin, they’ll be humbled, and they’ll repent, and they’ll seek more grace from Christ. And as they feed upon Christ by faith, as the Spirit’s using the Word, they’ll grow in holiness. And likewise, as they’re drawn to Christ by the power of the Spirit using the Word, they’ll grow in comfort. So the Lord is nurturing them, maturing them, developing them, sanctifying them, and comforting them. What a blessing! And if you and I would ever be further sanctified, or more greatly comforted, we require this work of the Spirit through the Word.

Well, thirdly, The Pursuit of Blessing by the Word. We need to think about how blessed a gift it is that God has given us his Word. There are many people in this world who don’t have the Bible. Perhaps you’re accessing this lesson, and you don’t have a copy of the Bible. Maybe it is that you’re listening to this lesson, and passages of the Bible are being quoted and presented, and you’re wondering, “Oh, that I could read more of the Bible!” Many people have the Bible, and those who have it often don’t treasure it as they ought. We need to see how precious a gift to us the Bible is. We read in Psalm 12, and verse 6, “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” What a blessed thing, a pure thing the Word of God is. Paul wrote to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3, and verse 15, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” In itself, the Bible is perfect and pure. And as God uses it, it alone is able to lead us to faith in Christ Jesus. Supremely, we see then its transcendent value. It is a book like no other book. Oh, it has its words, it’s sentences, its subjects and objects, its verbs and adjectives, and parts of speech; it records history; it gives promises and prophecies. But there’s no book like the Bible, because the Bible alone is able to make us wise unto salvation which is by faith in Christ Jesus.

This is because of what the Bible is. Paul writes of this in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. It’s breathed out by God. The Bible is God’s Word. Just as you and I speak, and form words for others to hear, by our breathing and forming of our sounds into words, the Bible contains the very words of the true and living God.

There's no book like this book.

Well, since it alone is the true, inerrant, and perfect Word of God, and since it alone is able to make us wise unto salvation, we ought to use it differently than other books. Oh, we ought to read other books carefully. But this book is of a special nature, because it is God's Word. I do not mean that we should be superstitious and invent ceremonies regarding God's Word. Nor do I mean that we should not approach it with diligence to understand it in our reading. We simply mean that as it is the Word of God, whenever we read it, whenever we hear it read, whenever the Word of God is preached, we should approach it for what it is. It is God's Word. Think of how certain men and women in this world would cause us to listen more attentively if they were to speak—perhaps a ruler of your land, or some dignitary of a foreign nation. Because of their office, we listen more attentively. A teacher, or maybe a principal of a school would make us pay attention. Well, who more to make us pay attention than God himself? And whenever God's Word is read, and whenever it's preached faithfully, it's God who's speaking.

Well, this is why the Catechism directs us to the following ways we should use God's Word. As we use it in the way noted, and as God graciously blesses it then to us, we enjoy the rich blessings which Christ has purchased for his people.

Well first, notice we're to approach it rightly. This is what the Answer to Question #90 means when it says, when we read it, we're to "attend thereunto." That is, when we think of the word "attend," we sometimes think merely of the word "to be present." If we attend a dinner, for instance, we're present at the meal. But the word used in the Catechism comes from one meaning to direct or exert ourselves. It's related to our use of the word "attentive." If we are attentive, we are focused and observing something diligently.

Well, how is it then that we are supposed to attend to the reading and preaching of God's Word? How are we to approach it or focus upon God's Word? Notice, "with diligence, preparation, and prayer." Well, to be diligent, is to be eager, committed, and active in a work. To approach God's Word with diligence then means that we are to be eager, committed, and active in that reading and hearing. Sometimes people think of the sermon, as if that's the time when the preacher is active in worship, and the people aren't. And yet, what a false view of what's taking place! When the preacher is preaching, the hearers are to be actively, eagerly engaged to understand and to discern the truth.

Well, additionally we're to approach it with preparation. This preparation is twofold: outward and inward. Outwardly, we should prepare, by setting distractions aside. Private reading requires that we set aside time. We don't approach God's Word randomly. We prepare; we have a general plan, a time, a place, a portion to read. Now, we don't need to be so strict about this that we cannot adapt when needed. For instance, if we typically read first thing in the morning at our desk or at a bench, there will be times when we're away from home, so we won't be able to read at our usual spot. Or if we're reading through a particular book of the Bible, perhaps something comes up in our family, and for a few days it would be wise to focus on a different part of the Bible. The point is that we don't approach God's Word carelessly. Well, similarly, when we're going to church, we put away distractions so that we can focus on the reading and preaching of God's Word among the other elements of worship. We don't approach it carelessly or casually.

But it's not merely an outward thing. There is an inward, spiritual act of preparing. First Peter 2, verses 1 and 2, Peter writes, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Peter calls us to prepare by setting aside sins—malice, guile, and so on. This

is a preparing by repentance. If we're going to feed upon the pure milk of God's Word, we should turn away from the bitter poison of sin and the world. This is to prepare.

Well, to approach God's Word with prayer is to confess that we need God to help us understand. We need him to bless his Word to us. Psalm 119 is filled with these kinds of requests. As one example—and I encourage you to find others—notice Psalm 119, verse 18: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." This is how we should approach both our personal and family reading of God's Word, and our listening to it read and preached in public worship. If we're to enjoy any blessing, it must be as God mercifully helps us. So surely, we ought to pray.

Well, notice also what we're to do when we read it or hear it preached—we're to "receive it with faith and love." Well, to receive it with faith and love is to lead us then to laying it up in our hearts, and practicing it in our lives. So to receive it with faith means that we're believing it. We're not just understanding. We need to understand—our minds must be active—but we're trusting it, the commands—we're saying, yes, these are true, we're going to submit to them; the promises, yes these are true, we're going to embrace them, and we're going to cherish them. So we're willingly hearing; we're with desire hearing; and with belief we're hearing. And so, when we have this faith and love, as it's read, as it's preached, and know there's no other book that we can do this, where from the beginning to the end, we say, "Whatever here is stated, I will believe it, and it's good to be loved.

Well, when this happens, it leads to laying it up in our hearts, and practicing it in our lives. To lay it up in our hearts is to meditate on it and treasure God's Word. It's as if when we take something that's sweet, and we keep it in our mouth because of the pleasure it brings. When God's Word enters our heart, we say, "Oh, I want it to stay there." Psalm 119:11 says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." True, we must understand the Bible with our minds, however, it is to hit a deeper target. It's to penetrate to our hearts, so that what we love and delight in is now loving and delighting in Christ. We meditate on it, and it nourishes our souls.

To practice it in our lives means that we believe its promises, we obey its commandments. We're not merely reading or listening to God's Word to be informed. That's true, but we're being informed in order, by God's grace, as the Spirit blesses, to be transformed; to be changed; to be saved; to be sanctified; to be made to glorify and enjoy God.

Well, if you have access to the Bible, consider what a blessed treasure you have—God's very Word. Oh, how it ought to be regularly read, and prayed over, and meditated upon, and studied! And when you go to church, oh, how eagerly you ought to listen to the Word read and preached, and with anticipation, yearning and praying, "Oh God, bless thou the reading and the preaching, that my soul would know the effectual work of the Spirit applying Christ to me." You see, this changes the way we prepare. It changes the way we read. Now, with anticipation and longing, I don't only want to understand. I do want to understand, but with that understanding, I long to be transformed. If unconverted, "Oh God, convert me!" If converted, "Oh God, sanctify me, instruct me, guide me!"

And so, as you read God's Word, notice, you need God's Spirit to open and apply this treasure to you. You may be able to read it, you may be able to understand the main points, but you'll never enjoy the true riches of it without the Spirit's sovereign and gracious work. This means, as we read it and hear it, we need to see how dependent we are upon God the Holy Spirit, and so, how we ought to cry out to him, to depend upon him, and to resolve that when there's a commandment given, I will obey it. Where there's a promise given, by God's grace, I will believe it. Where history

is recorded, I will acknowledge it to be true. We prepare, in order, by God's blessing, to receive, that we then, by his work, would glorify and enjoy him. Oh, treasure God's Word, read God's Word, listen to God's Word, hear good preaching. And as you do, may God, by his Spirit, bless it to you that you would better know the riches of grace through Jesus Christ.