

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTIONS # 12 & 7.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #12. *What are the decrees of God?*

A. God's decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will,¹ whereby, from all eternity, he hath, for his own glory, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time,² especially concerning angels and men.

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #7. *What are the decrees of God?*

A. The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.³

Question 1—*What is the nature of the decrees?*

Answer—For God to decree is to purpose and fore-ordain, to will and appoint that a thing shall be or not be, Eph. 1:11. In all creatures, there is a distinction between *potency*, or *power*, and *act*, or *actualization*, whereby the creature may fall short of the power to actualize his purpose, Prov. 16:9; however, in God the decree is the guarantee of the act, so that his decrees are already incipient acts, Isa. 46:10, 11. In this, it is clear that men's purposes, or decrees, are distinct from themselves, but the decrees of God are not distinct from himself, Heb. 6:17. God's decrees are nothing else but God himself, who is one simple act, *cf.* Rom. 11:34 *with* Prov. 23:7; and they are many only in respect of their objects, not as they are in God, Eph. 1:9. Such decrees must be granted since God is absolutely perfect, Job 12:13; and therefore nothing can come to pass without his will, Isa. 28:29.

Thus, this decreeing, or foreordaining, must not be supposed to be God determining things in such a way that would argue any imperfection in the divine mind, Prov. 8:14. It is not the result of deliberation, or debating matters within himself, nor is it reasoning in his own mind about the expediency or in expediency of things, nor in the calling in of the advice of others, Isa. 40:13, 14. These decrees, then, are to be accounted most wise, not exhibiting any imperfection of conception, Rom. 11:33; most free, whereby they are subject to no external consideration nor do they arise involuntarily, Rom. 9:14, 15, 18; and, finally, as are all the works of God, they are most holy, Ps. 145:17. Furthermore, these decrees do not depend upon the existence of time in order to become determinations, but they are the very knowing which determines all that pertains to time, Acts 15:18.

Question 2—*What is the object of God's decrees?*

Answer—The object of God's decrees is whatsoever comes to pass, so that nothing comes to pass but what he has decreed to come to pass, and that from all eternity, Eph. 1:4, 11.

¹ Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:33; 9:14, 15, 18.

² Eph. 1:4, 11; Rom. 9:22, 23; Ps. 33:11.

³ Eph. 1:4, 11; Rom. 9:22, 23.

First, God has decreed to create all things which have a being, Ps. 104:24, 25. These being decreed in order to fulfill the good pleasure of his own will, Rev. 4:11.

Second, God has decreed to rule and govern all of the creatures which he was to make, Rom. 11:36. This government includes not only the good but the evil, Eph. 1:11. The evil of punishments is truly a good thing, being the execution of a just judgment against those set in opposition to the divine will, Amos 3:6. Also, the evil of sin, being the permission to act contrary to the revealed will of God, in order that the greater good of his secret will comes to pass, Acts 2:23. This latter kind of evil being spoken of by our Lord, Matt. 18:7.

This decree respects not only necessary things, such as the burning of fire, but the most free acts of the creature, and the most casual things which exist, Acts 4:28. That the free acts of the creature are encompassed by this decree is held forth by Solomon, Prov. 21:1. So, too, those casual acts, whereby the will of the creature is not consulted in the determination of the action, Ex. 21:12, 13. It is a decree which encompasses both the great actions of men, Gen. 50:20; as well as the smallest actions, Prov. 16:33. There is nothing so small that it is excluded from this divine determination, Matt. 10:29, 30.

He has decreed the rise and fall of kingdoms and monarchies, princes and potentates, and whether their governments should be mild or tyrannical, Isa. 40:15-17; Dan. 4:35. He has decreed all things pertaining to particular persons as well: 1.) Both the time and place of their birth, whether in a land or family in which the light of the Gospel shines forth, Acts 17:26. 2.) Their employments and their elevation in estate, Amos 7:14, 15. 3.) The relations they have amongst men, both of wives and children, Gen. 24:44; 4:25; Ps. 127:3. 4.) All of the comforts, both temporal and spiritual, Isa. 26:1. 5.) All of the afflictions which are laid upon men, Mic. 6:9. 6.) The time of every man's life in this world, Job 7:1.

Third, God has decreed the eternal state of all his rational creatures, both men and angels, Rom. 9:22, 23.

Question 3—*What is the end of the decrees of God?*

Answer—The end of the decrees of God is his own glory, Rom. 11:36. As every rational agent acts for an end, and God, being the most perfect agent, and his glory the highest end, there can be no doubt that all his decrees are directed toward that end, Eph. 1:12.

The glory of God was the end for which he created the heavens, Ps. 19:1. They were made to declare and manifest to the world the attributes and perfections of the great Creator, Ps. 8:3. Indeed, all of the creation shows some evidence or print of God stamped upon it, whereby they together show forth the wisdom and goodness that framed their very being, Rom. 1:20. Likewise, the glory of God was the great end and design in making both men and angels, that they might glorify him, Prov. 16:4. This is also the end of election and predestination, that God may be glorified in his relations toward the rational creatures, 2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 9:21. God has called forth a people to his own glory, Isa. 43:21.

Finally, this glory, being the end of all things, is the unchangeable expression of the unchangeable God, Ps. 33:11. As nothing can escape his first view, so nothing can be added to his knowledge, Num. 23:19. Thus, his decree concerning election is irreversible, 2 Tim. 2:19.