

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTIONS # 14 & 8.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #14. *How doth God execute his decrees?*

A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will.¹

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #8. *How doth God execute his decrees?*

A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.

Question 1—*What is meant by the execution of the decrees?*

Answer—The decrees of God, being his eternal purpose, it would be inconsistent with the very idea of his infinite perfection of being to suppose that they might not come to pass, Num. 23:19. Should God not effect the execution of his decrees, he would lose all of the declarative glory that is encompassed in those decrees, Isa. 43:13. Accordingly, we must consider his power exerted, in order to the accomplishment of his purpose, Ps. 135:6. Unlike the various and sundry reasonings and purposings in men, the purpose of God, in his eternal decree, shall be brought into existence, Prov. 19:21.

This eternal decree, under its consideration as decrees, as manifesting itself through the prism of the whole of the creation, is the divine rationale for all of the works of God, Acts 15:18. They represent various aspects of the same eternal purpose which is displayed in redemption itself, Eph. 3:11.

Question 2—*How are these decrees executed?*

Answer—These decrees are accomplished through the exertion of his will, Eph. 1:11. This good pleasure of his will is said to have occurred in two distinct ways; *first*, in the production of all things, which is called the work of *creation*, Rev. 4:11; *second*, in the upholding and governing of all things, which is his *providence*, Dan. 4:35. Thus, the execution of God's decrees consists when he brings them to pass, or when he gives an actual being in time to what he purposed from eternity, Isa. 28:29.

First, God executed his decrees in the work of creation, in which he made all things according as he eternally purposed to make them, Rom. 11:36. This creation connotes that execution of his purpose entirely without any intervening means, John 1:3. Thus, all things which pertain to creation were brought into their very existence solely through the agency of God, Ps. 33:6. Although this work is the beginning of all that there is outside of God, it is a work which has special reference to the existence of other intelligent and moral beings, both angels and men, Col. 1:16; Gen. 1:27.

Second, God executes his decrees in the works of providence, in which he preserves and governs all things according to his eternal purpose and counsel, Isa. 46:10. This, too, is sometimes spoken of as a creation, when God speaks of his immediate direction of things to achieve his purposes, Ps. 102:18; Ezek. 21:30. Elsewhere, to signify those

¹ Eph. 1:11.

dispensations of providence as they manifest the wonderful effects of divine power, yet to be taken in a sense different from the first production of all things, Isa. 45:7.

Although the difference between God's execution of the work of creation and that of providence consists in whether or not he does make use of means, Prov. 20:24; yet, whatever use God may make of second causes in executing his purposes, they are all instruments in his hand to bring about his glorious designs, Acts 4:27, 28.

From this, we may infer that everything which God has made in the world, and everything which has taken place, and shall take place in his providence, is the result of his eternal purpose, Prov. 8:14; Isa. 14:24, 27. Likewise, we may be assured that all his promises shall be fully accomplished, and not one of them shall fail, Mark 13:31.

In the working of these decrees, we must distinguish into that which is *effective*, and that which is *permissive*.

His *effective* decree respects all the good that comes to pass, whether it be moral or natural goodness, Ps. 136:1. All the actions and motions of the creatures have a natural goodness in them, so far as they are actions and so far as they serve his eternal purposes, Ps. 76:10; Acts 2:23. Thus, God has decreed to effect all actions, even those which are sinful, considered as natural, Prov. 16:4. He is the first and universal cause of all things, the fountain and original of all that is truly good, Ps. 119:68. That the natural goodness, as effecting the moral goodness of God is decreed, is noted in respect to the oppressions of the church by wicked men, Ps. 115:3.

His *permissive* decree respects that which is irregular and the depravity that is in sinful actions, Ps. 81:12. God decreed to permit the same, or he determined it to be, himself permitting it, Hos. 4:17; Rom. 1:24. Thus, it is said that God did, in time, permit men to walk in sinful courses, Acts 14:16; which could not be except that he had decreed to do so from eternity, Rom. 9:22. So, then, the futurity of sin is from the decree of God, for he has so determined it to be, Job 21:30. Though he did not decree to have any efficiency in sin, considered as such (that being wholly from the creature), Jas. 1:14, 15; nonetheless, he willed that it should be done, himself permitting it, Matt. 26:24. The counsel of God did not determine to do it, as it is sinful, but that it should be done, John 13:27; Gen. 50:20.

Question 3—*According to what does God execute his decrees?*

Answer—First, this execution is carried out according to the infallible foreknowledge of God whereby: 1.) He knows from eternity, so that nothing ever did, or does, or can elude his knowledge, Isa. 41:22, 23. This includes not only what he himself intended to do, but also what he would incline and permit others to do, Luke 22:22. 2.) He knows nothing now, nor will know anything hereafter, which he did not know and foresee from eternity, his foreknowledge being co-eternal with himself and extending to all things, Heb. 4:13. 3.) This is not a bare, or conjectural and uncertain, but a most sure and infallible knowing, Rom. 8:29, 30. 4.) This infallible foreknowledge does not render secondary causes needless, nor does it destroy the nature of the things in themselves, Isa. 10:5-15.

Second, this infallible foreknowledge, taken abstractly, is not the sole cause of beings and events, but it is his free and immutable counsel of will together with this foreknowledge, Acts 2:23. This divine will is: 1.) Absolutely free, so that whatever it does, or permits to be done, are his good pleasure, Job 23:13, 14. 2.) That by which everything that comes to pass, comes to pass by virtue of this omnipotent will of God, which is the supreme and primary cause of all things, Ps. 33:9; 148:5, 6. 3.) Is so the cause of all things that it is itself without cause, Matt. 11:25; Jas. 1:18; John 1:13; Rom. 9:15, 18.