

**WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH
SHORTER CATECHISM**

**LESSON # 9 (Q1LES9) - THE DECREES OF GOD
QUESTIONS# 7 & 8**

1. Prayer
2. Bible reading: Isaiah 43:1 - 21
3. Review: In the last lesson we began learning what man is to believe concerning God. We started with what God's Word tells us about what God is. We learned that God is a spirit, without body or form. God is also infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his characteristics, including His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. There is but one God, and He is the living and true God. He manifests himself in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. These three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.
4. Introduction: This week's lesson will cover SC questions 7, and 8.. These two questions discuss the decrees of God. At first, I thought that this would probably be a very short lesson, and I thought about maybe covering another question. But as I dug into it, I found the subject matter much more substantial than I anticipated.
5. Questions & Answers.

Question 7. **What are the decrees of God?**

Answer: **The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the council of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.**

Question 8. **How doth God execute his decrees?**

Answer: **God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.**

5. DECREES OF GOD

Last week we determined what God is. This week we will learn about His decrees.

a. **What is a decree?**

My Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary says a decree is: "*An ordinance or order issued by a person or body of persons in authority deciding what is to be done in a certain matter, or what is to take place; an edict; a decision; a command; as the decree of the emperor; an ecclesiastical decree.*"

So, God being the ultimate authority, his decrees would be God's orders or directions as related to his eternal purpose.

Last week we defined "eternal" as "without beginning or end", so God's eternal purpose would be the purpose he has had from before time until forever.

- b. The WCF, c3p1 begins, "*God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass:*"

6. COUNCIL OF HIS WILL

- a. Point out a minor discrepancy. A quick example to prove that catechisms are of men, not of God. The SC in the WCF, the orange book, as well as the answer to LC question 12 (same question as Q7 of the SC), say, "council of his will". WCF, c2p1, & TV say "council of his own will". This is in accordance with the most used scripture proof which is (**Ephesians 1:11** "*In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things, according to the council of his own will*").
- b. Why say "council of his will"? Why not just say God's will? It is important to understand the nature of God.

Define "council" Again, my famous Websters dictionary has several definitions:

- 1. consultation, mutual interchange of opinions, ideas, etc. discussion and deliberation. This is the definition I assumed was intended, because the council would take place between the three persons of the Godhead. but....

a second definition seems a good possibility

- 2. Wisdom, prudence; examination of consequences; deliberate opinion or judgment, or the faculty or habit of judging with caution

- 3. a third definition is "one who provides council"

- c. So what is meant by the "council of his will"?

(Gen 1: 26 “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”)

- d. It could be any of the three.

7. FOR HIS OWN GLORY

- a. Why did they put “*for His own glory*” in here?

In question 1 we learned that man’s chief end is to glorify God, that the universe was created, and man was put on earth to glorify God. **Therefore, all of His decrees, all of the things that He will, are only for His glory!!!**

8. FORE-ORDAINED WHATSOEVER COMES TO PASS

- a. This section is difficult!!! But I think we can have some fun working with it.
- b. Careful reading of the WCF, the LC, and TV seem to break God’s decrees into two types, general and special.

- 1. General decrees: TV says of general decrees “God’s general decrees are his eternal purpose, whereby he hath foreordained whatever comes to pass; not only the being of all creatures, which he doth make, but also all their motions and actions; not only good actions, which he doth effect, but also the **PERMISSION** of all evil actions”. **(Acts 4: 27 – 28 “⁽²⁷⁾For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together, ⁽²⁸⁾For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy council determined before to be done.”)**

In para 5b above, we learned that the **WCF, c3p1** begins: “*God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass:*”. It continues: “*yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.*”

These quotes seem to say that from all eternity, God ordained whatsoever comes to pass, except.....

- 1. God not author of sin. **(James 1:13 “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:”)**

2. God did not put violence in will of creatures (all creatures)
3. contingency of second cause not taken away, but established. (**John 19:11** *“Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”*)

How can God foreordain whatsoever comes to pass, and yet not be the author of sin?

What is meant by *“nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but established.”*

Read:

(Acts 2:23 *“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:”*)

and

(Matt 17:12 *“But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.”*)

From these verses, what it appears to be saying is that other influences, or “second causes” are based on authority granted by God. Man, through God’s authority, has the capability to do evil.

2. Special decrees: C3p3 of the WCF says: *“By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and other foreordained to everlasting death.”*

(Proverbs 16: 4 – 5 ⁽⁴⁾*The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.* ⁽⁵⁾*Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall no be unpunished.”*)

(2 Thess 2: 13 *“But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth:”*)

It seems obvious from Scripture that God predestinated some to hell, and others to everlasting life. How can it be that a just and merciful God, a God with only goodness and mercy in him can create something which will be

condemned to the pains of hell forever? Romans 9:21 - 22 talks of the potter having power over the clay. But a person created by God is not clay, it has a soul. How is it that they are created predestined to hell?

TV says *“It was neither the good works foreseen in the one which moved him to choose them, nor the evil works foreseen in the other which moved him to pass them by; but only because he would, he chose some, and because he would not, he did not choose the rest, but decreed to withhold that grace which he was nowise bound to give unto them, and to punish them justly for their sins, as he might have punished all, if he had so pleased.”* (Rom 9: 11, 13, 19 ⁽¹¹⁾*(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)* ⁽¹³⁾*As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* ⁽¹⁹⁾*Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault: for who hath resisted his will?”*)

No free will here. How does the doctrine of free will fit into this picture?

Chapter 3, para. 8 of the WCF says *“The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in His Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.”*

9. HOW DOTH GOD EXECUTE HIS DECREES?

- a. **In the works of creation and providence.**
- b. The works of creation. These are covered in SC questions 9 and 10, which we will cover next week.
- c. The works of providence. These are covered in SC questions 11 and 12, which we will cover the following week

10. More food for thought.

WCF, chapter 3, para 2 says *“Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such*

conditions.". What does this say?