

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or two questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to oakhillpca.com/wsc

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 has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.*

Q. 8. How does God execute his decrees?

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

After speaking briefly about the nature of God (Questions 4-6), the Catechism brings our attention to what God does. The "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable" God is never frustrated or confounded. Nothing limits him in what he does. Scripture affirms this in multiple ways:

Psalm 33:11 *The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. (cf. Is. 14:24)*

Ephesians 1:11 *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...*

What God plans, what God desires, what God designs, comes to pass. The Catechism uses the word "decrees" to speak about these scriptural truths. A decree is a statement of intention or will or plan of action. God decrees, or makes known, his purpose and it happens.

The follow up question asks how does God *do* his decrees, or bring them about. Following the lead of Scripture, the Catechism categorizes God's decrees under the works of creation and the works of providence (which are addressed, in turn, in the following questions). The ultimate decree, or purpose of God, is his own glory. He achieves this all-encompassing decree through his created works (Ps. 19:1-6) and through his providential care for creation and his people (Jn. 17:4; Rom. 11:33-36).

One common question related to God's decrees is about evil (often framed as "the problem of evil"). The Catechism does not address this question and we don't have the space in this context to answer it thoroughly. The short answer is, yes, God decrees everything that occurs, even evil, without becoming the agent or cause for sin. The most poignant example is the death of Jesus, of which Peter says, "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23).

Our response is one of awe and humble trust in the God who "works all things" in our lives "according to the counsel of his will."