Catechism, Sec 3: What God Has Done

by B. S. Poh

Q7. What are the decrees of God?

A. **The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His own will, whereby for His own glory He has fore-ordained whatever comes to pass[1].**

1. *Eph. 1:11-12, In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.*

Comments

1. The plan of God has existed from eternity and will never change. This is different from chance or fate, for God is a living and intelligent being who powerfully controls all things, without suppressing the human will and the so-called laws of nature, created by Himself. Man, therefore, is not reduced to a mere robot or pawn on a chessboard but is held responsible for his actions. Being good, holy and just, God is not the author of sin or evil. Rather, He allows these to happen while bringing them to fulfill His good and wise purpose.

Q8. How does God execute his decrees?

A. **God executes His decrees in the works of creation[1], and providence[2].**

1. *Rev. 4:11, You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.*

2. *Dan. 4:35, All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"*

Comments

1. Creation concerns the origin of all things. Providence concerns actions and events seen in space and time (i.e. in the universe and throughout history). These are subjects too vast for man to handle, yet he attempts to usurp God by giving alternative views of the origin of things and declaring his own sufficiency. We are reminded of children play-acting being adults.

2. By submitting ourselves to God, we derive great comfort in realizing that He is in absolute control, such that our life is filled with purpose, a sense of direction, and a sense of destiny.

Q9. What is the work of creation?

A. The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing[1], by the word of His power[2], in six normal consecutive days[3], and all very good[4].

Notes: We have adopted the wordings of C. H. Spurgeon, replacing "in the space of six days" with "in six normal consecutive days". Darwinism, i.e. the theory of evolution, was already a problem in Spurgeon's time.

1. *Gen. 1:1, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

2. *Heb. 11:3, By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

3. *Ex. 20:11, For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.*

4. *Gen. 1:31, Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*

Comments
1. Man makes things out of existing things. He "creates" a piece of art, music, or architecture from concepts learned from existing things. Only God created all things out of nothing - including space, time, designs, objects, and life. He did so effortlessly, by His divine power. Everything was accomplished in six normal consecutive days, all according to His plan. Nothing was done too slowly or too fast. Everything created by God was very good - physiologically and morally. In other words, the end-product of creation did not show any deficiency in the power, wisdom, and holiness of God.

2. Two points must be noted. First, the alternative theories of the origin of things are contrary to the teaching of Scriptures - atheistic evolution, theistic evolution, the gap theory, and progressive/ process creation. Quite many Christians who reject atheistic evolution attempt to incorporate important aspects of the theory, including the idea that the earth is billions of years old, into the Bible's teaching on creation. Theistic evolutionists believe that God started the "Big Bang", and occasionally intervened, such as when He breathed into certain "pre-Adamic man" the breath of life. The gap theory claims that there was a gap of millions of years between the first two verses of Genesis 1, which is not recorded. Process creationists claim that the "day" in Genesis 1 is not a single rotation of the earth but a long undefined period of time. All these "theories" require that there was death, disease and suffering before the sin of Adam, that God did not create everything "very good", and assumes the earth is billions of years old. Second, evil is not inherent in the creation of God, but in the sinful nature of fallen man. We must not think that material things are somehow evil while the soul of man is pure, and put the blame of our suffering upon the things and circumstances around us.

Q10. What are God's works of providence?
A. God's works of providence are His powerful preserving[1] and governing all His creatures[2], and all events[3].

Notes: We have replaced "His most holy, wise, and powerful..." with "His powerful...", believing that the emphasis intended lies there. God's attributes of holiness and wisdom have been included in Q4. Furthermore, "and all their actions" is redundant and has been replaced by "and all events", because events such as eathquakes and volcanic eruptions are also under God's control.

1. *Heb. 1:3, Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

2. *Ps. 103:19, The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.*

3. *Matt. 10:29, Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.*

Comments

1. God did not create all things and then leave them to operate by inbuilt laws. Instead, all things - whether good or bad, big or small, done by man or occurring in nature - are maintained by His power and controlled by His will. Even the so-called laws of nature are under His control. In a fallen world, believers are comforted by the knowledge that everything occurs according to God's will, for the good of His people, and to His glory. Believing in providence, believers should avoid saying, "I was lucky", etc. Instead, we should say, "Thankfully...", "Happily...", "God was pleased to..." or "God saw fit to..."

Q11. How did God create man.

A. God created man, male and female, after His own image[1], in knowledge, holiness, and righteousness[2, 3], with dominion over the creatures[4].

Notes: Instead of "knowledge, righteousness, and holiness", the order has been changed to correspond to the normal orders of "mind, affection, and will" and "prophet, priest, and king".

1. *Gen. 1:27, So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

2. *Col. 3:10, And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.*

3. *Eph. 4:24, And that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

4. *Gen. 1:28, Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

Comments

1. God created woman to complement man. Any idea of the superiority of the one and the inferiority of the other is against the teaching for the Bible. Many traditional cultures treated women as inferior to men, which cannot be accepted by Christians (Gal. 3:27-28). Any attempt to blur the distinction between male and female is also contrary to Scripture. The modern feminist movement tends to go to this extreme while fighting for women's rights.

2. God created human beings to bear His image, i.e. with the ability to know spiritual truths, to worship God, and to obey His laws. He acts as prophet, priest and king - having dominion over the other creatures. It is man's responsibility to explore, to learn, to use, and to create. The whole of God's creation is for man to use, not to abuse.

Q12. What special act of providence was exercised toward man when he was created?

A. When God had created man, He entered into a covenant of works with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death[1].

Notes: We have replaced "in the estate wherein he was created" in the question with, "when he was created" to correspond with the answer which begins with, "When God had created man...". A semi-colon is used to separate the two parts of the answer.

1. *Gen. 2:16-17, And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

Comments

1. God exercised His right as the Creator to enter into a covenant, i.e. formal bond, with man based on the conditions He imposed. This covenant of works required perfect obedience on the part of man. Adam was created with a free will, given the incentive to eat from all the other trees, and the warning of the consequence of disobedience. It could not be said that God was unfair toward Adam.

2. If Adam had kept God's command, he would have continued to enjoy the blessed life of fellowship with God in the garden of Eden. This we know because he was allowed to eat from the tree of life before the Fall (Gen. 3:22 cf. Gen. 2:16). In fact, he might have been raised to an even higher level of existence. Adam, however, failed and came under God's judgement.

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