

Dusty Corners of the Westminster Shorter Catechism Studies 1 and 2

Handout.

John Owen on the use of doctrines other than the Bible:

“The Holy Spirit hath not in the Scripture reduced and disposed its doctrines or supernatural truths into any system, order, or method.”

“Truths have their power and efficacy upon our minds, not only from themselves, but from their posture in the Scripture.”

“...no man will make choice of a counsellor all whose wisdom consists in sayings and rules cast into a certain order and method. He alone is a good counsellor who, out of the largeness and wisdom of his own heart and mind, can give advice according unto all present occasions and circumstances. Such counsellors are the testimonies of God. Artificial methodizing of spiritual truths may make men ready in notions, cunning and subtle in disputations; but it is the Scripture itself that is able to “make us wise unto salvation.”

“In the writing and composing of the holy Scripture, the Spirit of God had respect unto the various states and conditions of the church...If all divine truths had from the first been stated and fixed in a system of doctrines, the state of the church must have been always the same; which was contrary unto the whole design of divine wisdom in those things.”

[There are some things we would like to keep the same throughout history. The Bible, Catechisms and Confessions are some of these]

“Such a systematical proposal of doctrines, truths, or articles of faith, as some require, would not have answered the great ends of the Scripture itself. All that can be supposed of benefit thereby is only that it would lead us more easily into a methodical comprehension of the truths so proposed; but this we may attain, and not be rendered one jot more like unto God thereby...The principal end of the Scripture is of another nature. It is, to beget in the minds of men faith, fear, obedience, and reverence of God,—to make them holy and righteous; and those such as have in themselves various weaknesses, temptations, and inclinations unto the contrary, which must be

obviated and subdued. Unto this end every truth is disposed of in the Scripture as it ought to be.”

The Vow Taken by the Attendees to the Westminster Assembly:

I [NAME] do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of Almighty God, that in this Assembly, whereof I am a member, I will maintain nothing in point of doctrine, but what I believe to be most agreeable to the word of God; nor in point of discipline, but what may make most for God’s glory, and the peace and good of this Church.

Harold Bloom:

“That which you get from another is never instruction, but always provocation.”

From Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism*:

*Be sure yourself and your own reach to know,
How far your Genius, Taste, and Learning go,
Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet,
And mark that point where Sense and Dulness meet.*

Question 7. What are the decrees of God?

Answer: 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.

*Psalm 33:11
(KJV)*

The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

From Chapter III of the *Westminster Confession*:

3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.

4. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

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5. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

6. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

Isaiah 14:24

(KJV)

The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.

Acts 2:23

(KJV)

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

Ephesians 1:11-12

(KJV)

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: 12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

Question 8. How doth God execute his decrees?

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

The Elixir

BY GEORGE HERBERT

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see,
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for thee;

Not rudely, as a beast,
To run into an action;
But still to make thee prepossessed,
And give it his perfection.

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleases, through it pass,
And on the heav'n espy.

All may of thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
That with his tincture (for thy sake)
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room as for thy laws,
Makes that and th' action fine.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold:
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.

Psalm 148

(ESV)

Praise the Name of the Lord

1

Praise the Lord!

*Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!*

2

*Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his hosts!*

3

*Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars!*

4

*Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!*

5

Let them praise the name of the Lord!

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For he commanded and they were created.
6
And he established them forever and ever;
he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.

7
Praise the Lord from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all deeps,
8
fire and hail, snow and mist,
stormy wind fulfilling his word!

9
Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

10
Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!

11
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

12
Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!

13
Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.

14
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the Lord!

Isaiah 40:26
(KJV)

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath
created these things, that bringeth out their host
by number: he calleth them all by names by the
greatness of his might, for that he is strong in
power; not one faileth.

Acts 4:24-28
(KJV)

And when they heard that, they lifted up their
voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord,
thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth,
and the sea, and all that in them is: 25 Who by the
mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the
heathen rage, and the people imagine vain
things? 26 The kings of the earth stood up, and
the rulers were gathered together against the
Lord, and against his Christ. 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 counsel determined before to be
done.

Revelation 4:11
(KJV)

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and
honour and power: for thou hast created all
things, and for thy pleasure they are and were
created.

Question 12: What special act of providence did
God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he
was created?

Answer: When God had created man, he entered
into a covenant of life 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.

prov·i·dence
/'prävədəns/

noun

noun: **providence**
the protective care of God or of nature as a
spiritual power. [OED]

Providence as defined by Berkof:

“...that work of God in which He preserves all His
creatures, is active in all that happens in the
world, and directs all things to their appointed
end.”

From Berkof:

The Elements of Divine Providence. We
distinguish three elements:

Divine preservation. This is that
continuous work of God by which He
upholds all things.

Divine concurrence. This may be defined
as that work of God by which He co-
operates with all His creatures and causes
them to act precisely as they do.

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Divine government. This is the continued activity of God whereby He rules all things so that they answer to the purpose of their existence.

Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

Misconceptions of Divine Providence:

The Deistic conception.

This is to the effect that God's concern with the world is of the most general nature. He created the world, established its laws, set it in motion, and then withdrew from it.

The Pantheistic conception.

Pantheism does not recognize the distinction between God and the world.

Genesis 2:16-17

(KJV)

*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying,
Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and
evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that
thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

James 2:10

(KJV)

*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet
offend in one point, he is guilty of all."*

Leviticus 20:7

(ESV)

*7 Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy,
for I am the Lord your God.*

Colossians 1:22

(ESV)

*22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by
his death, in order to present you holy and
blameless and above reproach before him,*

Nothing Gold Can Stay

BY ROBERT FROST

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.