

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 6.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #6. *What do the scriptures make known of God?*

A. The scriptures make known what God is,¹ the persons in the Godhead,² his decrees,³ and the execution of his decrees.⁴

Question 1—*What is to be observed in the revelation of Scripture?*

Answer—This comprehends an amazing act of condescension, and an inexpressible favor which God bestows on man, that he should not only manifest himself to him, as he does to all mankind, by the light of nature, which discovers that he is, Rom. 1:19, 20; but that he should, in so glorious a way, as he does in his Word, declare what he is, Ex. 3:13, 14. This is a distinguishing privilege and an instance of discriminating grace, as the Psalmist observes to his people, Ps. 147:19, 20. It is still more wonderful, that he should discover to man what he does, or rather what he has decreed or purposed to do, and so should impart his secrets to him, Gen. 18:17; Amos 3:7. It is one thing, however, to know the secret purposes of God, and another to know the various properties of them, John 15:15. The former, however known of old by extraordinary intimation, are now known to us only by the execution of them, John 8:56; Acts 2:33. These latter may be known by a careful study of the Scriptures, Ps. 77:11; 1 Pet. 1:10-12.

Scripture, then, makes known to us what God is both absolutely, *ad intra*, as well as relatively, *ad extra*, Isa. 42:8; 44:6; and what God is personally, both *ad intra*, John 17:5; and, *ad extra*, 2 John 9. It is also concerned to make known to us what God decrees, which is a working *ad intra*, Eph. 1:9; and the execution of those decrees, which is his working *ad extra*, Acts 3:18.

Question 2—*Why does Scripture make what God is known to us?*

Answer—Although *that* there is a God is made known in and through natural revelation, Ps. 19:1-4; *what* God is cannot be discerned from nature because men are now in an estate fallen from that God, Ps. 19:7, 8. Thus, Scripture confirms that *God is* and adds to this natural knowledge an understanding of *what this God is* which exists, Heb. 11:6.

The knowledge *that God is* consists of that knowledge which is to be absolutely considered and is, therefore, only made known by way of special revelation, Deut. 33:26, 27. This knowledge also consists of knowledge which is relatively to be considered, as it relates to and is made known to men, some by special and other by natural revelation, Ps. 8:3; 115:16.

Additionally, this knowledge consists in that knowledge of what this God is, which is to be found only in that special revelation contained in the Scriptures, Gen. 15:1; Ps. 58:11.

¹ Heb. 11:6.

² 1 John 5:7.

³ Acts 15:14, 15, 18.

⁴ Acts 4:27, 28.

Question 3—*Why must Scripture make known to us the existence of the three persons in the Godhead?*

Answer—That there is a Godhead, is a matter of natural revelation, Rom. 1:20; Acts 17:28, 29. That in this Godhead there are three distinguishable persons, or subsistences (*hypostases*), is a matter which is only made known through special revelation, in Scripture, 1 John 5:7.

As these three persons are necessarily in the Godhead, and exist as a matter pertaining to eternal distinctions which subsist in the divinity, this knowledge is *ad intra*, John 1:1, 2. The existence of these three persons, in the Godhead, therefore does not form part of that natural revelation which exists in the creature as a necessary adjunct of being created, John 4:22.

This knowledge of personal distinctions, together with the knowledge of his own essential existence, forms the body of divine knowledge necessary to God pertaining to himself absolutely considered, Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:11.

As these three persons are involved in the works of God, they must be made known by a special revelation, Acts 17:23; whereby each person may be assigned that work proper to his own *hypostasis* as it bears a relation *ad extra*, John 1:3, 4, 9; 14:26.

Question 4—*Why must Scripture make known his decrees?*

Answer—The decrees of God, which represent the eternal deliberations of the divine will, are the eternal purposes of God, Eph. 1:4, 11. These decrees, because of the simplicity of the divine nature, John 4:24; Job 23:13; and unity of the divine purpose in the Godhead, are the revelation of a singular purposing whereby God does, from eternity, whatsoever he please, Isa. 46:10, 11. This singular divine purpose is best described as the divine good pleasure, Eph. 1:5; Phil. 2:13.

This eternal decree, or divine determination, has respect both to the Godhead, or the voluntary deliberations among the Trinity, Isa. 42:6; and the will of God toward, or in relation to, the creation, Acts 15:14, 15, 18. The latter is to be seen as the result of the former, whereby God both sent his Son and the Spirit to bring those things to pass determined from eternity, John 6:39; 15:26.

Apart from a special revelation, these matters elude the ability of the natural mind to perceive them in their true connection, Acts 2:16.

Question 5—*Why must Scripture make known the execution of his decrees?*

Answer—Once more, although the works of God, in creation and providence, are discernable to men, they are not in their true connection, Acts 4:27, 28.

The work of God in creation may and should be apparent to all men, Ps. 33:6-9; yet, because men are sinners by nature, they continually turn this witness into occasions for more sinning, Acts 14:15-18. In this way, they have come to serve the creature, or creation, more than the Creator, as Paul complains, Rom. 1:25.

So, too, the providence of God, though it represents the continual upholding and sustaining of all of creation and all of the actions of the creatures, Luke 6:35; Matt. 5:45; yet men have through unbelief and an unguided look at providence moved to wrong conclusions about the God of providence, Ezek. 9:9; Zeph. 1:12.