

# Lesson 7: Questions 10 and 11



In Lesson 6 we asked who God is. We saw that:

- He is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being and all His perfections
- There is but one only, the living and true God
- This one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the same in essence, equal in power and glory

This week we ask a different kind of question. If this is who God is, what has He purposed to do; and how does He bring those purposes about in the real world? Questions 10 and 11 introduce us to the decrees of God and to His works of creation and providence as the way those decrees are carried out.

## Question 10 — What Are the Decrees of God?

Q. 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 hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

This answer gives us four key phrases to think about:

1. Eternal purpose
2. Counsel of His will
3. For His own glory
4. Foreordained whatsoever comes to pass

We will take them in turn and then ask what difference this makes for Christian discipleship.

### *1. His eternal purpose*

The decrees of God are first of all described as “His eternal purpose”. That means that God’s plan is not something He invented part way through history as He reacted to human choices or unexpected events. Before He created the world, God already knew and willed all that would come to pass.

Paul writes in [Ephesians 1:4](#) that God “*chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.*” A few verses later he says that God “*works all things according to the counsel of his will*” ([Ephesians 1:11](#)). Election is one part of that eternal purpose, but the language is broader. God works all things according to His will. There is nothing outside the scope of His purpose.

[Lamentations 3:37](#) pushes in the same direction. In the middle of a book full of tears, Jeremiah asks, “*Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?*” Behind every event stands the sovereign Lord. His decree is not a cold, abstract blueprint; it is His settled, personal intention about the world He has made.

### *2. According to the counsel of His will*

The catechism says that God’s decrees are His eternal purpose “according to the counsel of His will”. That phrase reminds us that God does not decree blindly or arbitrarily. He does not cast lots in heaven to decide how history will go. His decree reflects His own perfect justice, goodness, and truth.

When Scripture speaks of the “counsel” of God, it is using human language for something that happens within the life of God Himself. He needs no advisers, yet His purposes are fully thought out and perfectly wise. In [Isaiah 46:10](#), the Lord says, “*My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.*” There is no gap between what God decides and what God does; there is no gap between what would be wise and what He actually decrees.

This means that, even when we do not understand why something has happened, we are not dealing with random fate or blind necessity. We are dealing with the counsel of a Father Who is wise and good, even when His ways are hidden from us. We can trust even when we don’t understand.

### 3. For His own glory

Next, the catechism tells us that God's decrees are "for His own glory". God's purpose is God-centered. That can sound unsettling or selfish until we remember who God is. If the triune God is the first and chiefest Being, then His own glory really is the highest and best end of all things. There is nothing higher for Him to aim at or glorify.

Scripture is unashamed about this. Paul says that God chose us, predestined us, redeemed us, and sealed us with the Spirit "to the praise of his glorious grace" (**Ephesians 1:6**) and again "to the praise of his glory" (**Ephesians 1:12, 14**). **Romans 9:22-23** goes even further and says that God endures vessels of wrath and prepares vessels of mercy "in order to make known the riches of his glory". His decrees display who He is, ordered toward the glory of His excellencies for the good of His people.

This does not mean that God's glory is in competition with our good. On the contrary, our deepest good is to see and share in the glory of God. If God decreed anything less than His own glory, He would be decreeing something less than our true joy. **Romans 8:28** reminds us that "**for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**" (emphasis mine)

### 4. Foreordained whatsoever comes to pass

The most sweeping part of the definition is the last clause: God has "foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." **Nothing** that happens in heaven or on earth falls outside His decree. **Nothing**. That includes the rise and fall of nations; the length of our days; the details of our lives; and, in a way that stretches our minds, even the sinful actions of creatures. **Romans 9:22-23** again reminds us that God's purpose encompasses even the hard realities of judgment. **Isaiah 46:10** has the Lord "**declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done**". He does not merely **know** the future; He **declares** it. History is not a film He has **watched** in advance; it is a story He has **authored**.

**Lamentations 3:37** exposes our instinct to limit God's control. That question expects the answer: no one. If something comes to pass, it is because the Lord has, in some sense, commanded it.

At this point we must be careful. Scripture is equally clear that **God is not the author of sin** and that **humans are responsible for their actions**. But we are not puppets. Sin is what we **want** to do; our choices are **real** and **morally charged**. Yet those choices are never outside God's sovereign purpose.<sup>1</sup>

The clearest example is the cross. **Acts 2:23** says that Jesus was "**delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God**" and yet Peter tells the crowd, "**you crucified and killed**" Him. God **decreed** the crucifixion for our salvation; the people who carried it out are **still accountable**. Later in Acts, the believers say, "**for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.**" (**Acts 4:27-28**) If God decreed the most heinous evil to ever exist, the crucifixion of Christ, then all other troubling evil falls under His provision, too.

### 5. Why this doctrine matters

The decrees of God are not given to win arguments, but for our comfort and our humility.

1. They **humble** us. We are not ultimately in control of our own lives. **We make real choices and those choices matter**; yet behind all of them stands the eternal purpose of God. **Nothing that happens is devoid of purpose**.
2. They **comfort** us. If God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass according to the counsel of His wise and good will, then there are no accidents in His world. Nothing can separate us from His love in Christ (**Romans 8:38-39**), because **there is no event that lies outside His decree**. We can trust in the midst of suffering, because we trust the One through Whose hands the suffering comes.
3. They **motivate** us to **worship**. When we see God's hand not only in the big movements of history but also in the details of our own story, it should lead us to say with Paul, "**To Him be glory forever.**" (**Romans 11:36**)

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<sup>1</sup> This biblical view is known as compatibilism, the compatibility of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

## Question II — How Doth God Execute His Decrees?

Q. How doth God execute His decrees?

A. God executeth His decrees in the works of creation and providence.

Question IO told us *that* God has an eternal purpose whereby He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. Question II tells us *how* that purpose is carried out in time. The answer is beautifully simple. God executes His decrees in two great works: *creation* and *providence*. Everything God does in history fits under one of these two headings.

### 1. Creation as the beginning of the decree in time

Creation is *the moment* when God's eternal purpose begins to unfold in space and time. Until God speaks, there is no world, no history, no human story in which His decree can be carried out. [Genesis 1](#) presents God creating by His Word and Spirit. He calls things into existence that did not exist; He orders and fills the world; He makes man in His image.

The doctrine of decree guards us from thinking of creation as a whim or an experiment. God did not create because He was lonely or bored. He created in line with His eternal purpose to display His glory. The world exists so that the triune God might be known and praised.

This gives weight to the created order. The physical world is not a distraction from God's plan; it is the stage on which that plan is enacted. Human bodies, material culture, time, and place all matter, because they are the arena where God executes His decree.

### 2. Providence as God's ongoing execution of His decree

Providence is *the ongoing work* by which God sustains, governs, and directs all His creatures and all their actions. Creation is God's decree beginning; providence is His decree worked out in time.

Although Question II does not list proof texts, Scripture is full of them. [Hebrews 1:3](#) says that Christ "*upholds the universe by the word of his power.*" [Colossians 1:17](#) says that in Him "*all things hold together.*" Jesus tells us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from our Father and that the hairs of our heads are all numbered ([Matthew 10:29-30](#)). Proverbs reminds us that "*The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.*" ([Proverbs 16:9](#)) Providence has several strands.

- **Preservation:** God keeps creation in existence. If He withdrew His sustaining hand, everything would collapse into nothing.
- **Government:** God directs all creatures and events toward His appointed ends. Kings and empires rise and fall according to His purpose. Human decisions are real, yet they are instruments in His hand.
- **Concurrence:** God works in and through creaturely actions. Our choices do not run on a separate track from His will. Rather, He is at work in, under, around, and through them, without destroying their reality.

Again the cross is the clearest illustration. Human rulers, motivated by jealousy and fear, condemn Jesus. Soldiers do their brutal work. Yet all of this happens according to God's definite plan. (See [Acts 2:23, 4:27-28](#) above). Providence is not God occasionally intervening in an otherwise independent universe; it is His constant, active rule over all that He has made.

### 3. Decrees and responsibility

At this point many Christians worry: if God is executing His decree in all things, does that not make our choices meaningless or God the author of sin? We have already touched on this, but it is worth stating plainly. Scripture holds two truths side by side.

1. God executes His decrees in creation and providence. *Nothing falls outside His control.*
2. Creatures, especially human beings, are responsible for their actions. *Their obedience or disobedience is truly theirs.*

How these truths fit together goes beyond what we can fully grasp. The Bible does not explain the mechanics; it simply asserts both, so we must believe both. Our task is not to solve the mystery but to trust the God Who has revealed Himself as both sovereign and righteous.

Practically, this means that we never get to blame God for our sin. When we disobey, we own that disobedience. At the same time, when we obey, we give Him the credit, *“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* (**Philippians 2:13**) His providence is not an excuse for passivity; it is the hope that our labor in the LORD is not in vain.

#### 4. Decrees, providence, and everyday Christian life

The doctrine of God’s decree executed in creation and providence is not meant to live on a shelf. It shapes ordinary Christian living.

- **Prayer:** We pray *because* God is sovereign, not in spite of it. If He were not executing His decrees through providence, our prayers would be wishes thrown into the air. Because He rules all things, our prayers are *real means* He has appointed for carrying out His will.
- **Guidance:** We make plans and decisions with a quiet confidence that the LORD will direct our steps. We do not have to see the entire blueprint in order to be faithful. We walk in obedience to His revealed Word and trust that His hidden decree will be good.
- **Suffering:** When trials come, we do not say that God has lost control or been outmaneuvered. We say with Joseph, *“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good”* (**Genesis 50:20**). The same event of human wickedness is also God-ordained for wise and loving purposes.
- **Mission:** In evangelism and missions we labor with hope, because we know that God has a people whom He has chosen in Christ and that He executes His saving decrees through the preaching of the gospel. Our work is real; His decree guarantees that it will not be fruitless.

In short, God’s decrees executed in creation and providence make it possible to say that our lives are meaningful and yet not ultimate. We are real actors in a story whose Author is God.

## Conclusion — Resting in the God Who Plans and Acts

In Questions 7 to 9 we met the God Who is there: Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable; one God in three persons. In Questions 10 and 11 we have begun to see how that God relates to His world. He is not a distant observer. He has an eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, for His own glory, whereby He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. He executes that purpose in the works of creation and providence.

For some, this doctrine is unsettling. It confronts our desire to be in control. It tells us that, in the most ultimate sense, *our lives are not our own*. Yet for the believer in Christ, it is one of the most stabilizing truths in the Christian faith. Since the God Who loved us and gave His Son for us is the same God Who plans all things and works all things according to His will, then we can rest. Nothing comes to us that has not first passed through His wise and loving hands. (**Romans 8:31-39**)

As you go into this week, I would encourage you to respond in two ways.

- **First**, let this doctrine lead you to worship. Take some time to read **Ephesians 1** and **Romans 9** and simply praise God that He is big enough to have an eternal purpose and good enough to include you in it. Thank Him that your salvation, your future, and even the hard providences of your life are not random.
- **Second**, let it lead you to trust. Bring before Him the areas of your life where you are anxious or confused. You do not know how the story will unfold; He does. Ask Him for grace to *walk in obedience today*, trusting that His decree is wise and His providence is kind.

The God Who *plans* is the God Who *acts*.

The God Who *acts* is the God Who *has come near* to us in Jesus Christ.

To know His decrees and His providence is, in the end, to know *Him*.

Glory with me in His character and meticulous providence.