

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

Providence (1)

A. Introduction

1. Two things we are commanded to do as elders are to watch and to hold.

We are to watch what we believe, to make sure we are believing what God's Word says.

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Timothy 4:16)

We are to hold firmly to the truths taught in God's Word.

"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9)

It is vital we do these two things, not just for our own sake, but also for the members of this church and in fact those who live in the community God has placed us in.

To help us to watch and to hold, we are spending our elders' meeting working through the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith a paragraph or so at a time.

2. God's Decree, the focus of Chapter 3 in the Confession, is executed in the works of creation and providence.

In Chapter 4, the Confession discussed the work of creation, and now in Chapter 5 moves onto His work of providence.

What is providence?

"God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions." (Q15 Baptist Catechism)

This excellent definition is expanded on in the first paragraph of this Chapter of the Confession.

"God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto His infallible, foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will; to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy."

Providence describes the way, God in His goodness, and according to His infinite power and wisdom, provides for and cares for that which He has made.

B. The Scope of God's Providence

1. The actions of providence.

"does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern..."

Upholding – He is actively preserving and sustaining His creation.

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." (Hebrews 1:3)

"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:17)

Directing – no action or interaction that takes place in the universe is outside of His plan for creation.

"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning." (Daniel 2:20-21)

"From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live." (Acts 17:26)

Disposing – God is actively carrying out and accomplishing His purposes for His creation.

"What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned that will I do." (Isaiah 46:11)

Governing – He is in total control.

"The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths." (Psalm 135:6)

2. The objects of providence.

Who is God's providence directed towards?

"all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least."

Everything is under God's providential actions from the smallest bird to the whole universe, both animate and inanimate objects.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows." (Matthew 10:29-31)

C. The Nature of Providence

1. Every work of providence, even those that are bitter, are good.

They are good because they are done by God who is good.

"God is the good Creator of all things."

Since God is good, not only can you be certain that His creating work is good, but also that His providential work is good too.

2. Every work of providence, even those that are bitter, have a purpose.

They have a purpose because they are done by an all-wise God who has the power to carry out His will.

"in His infinite power and wisdom..."

"by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will."

Since God is powerful and wise, not only can you be certain that His creating work had a purpose, but also that His providential work will have a purpose too.

"But the plans of the LORD stand firm for ever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." (Psalm 33:11)

D. The Goal of Providence

1. As we reflect on God's works of providence in our own individual lives, in the lives of others, and in the history of the world, it should lead us to praise and glorify our God.

"...to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy."

2. What will we praise God for?

His wisdom.

His power.

His justice.

His infinite goodness.

His mercy.

All these things we see displayed most clearly in His accomplishment of our salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son.

E. How then shall we lead?

1. God's providence is a doctrine we can use to give comfort with.

No matter what has happened, is happening, or will happen, God is in control, and can bring great good out of great evil!

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good." (Genesis 50:20)

2. God's providence is a doctrine we can use to strengthen faith with.

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26)

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)