

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

Providence (4)

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. The subject of Chapter 5 of the Confession is God's providence.

The first paragraph provides a general summary looking at the scope, nature and goal of God's providence.

In the second and third paragraph, how God preserves and governs all His creatures and all their actions are discussed.

The fourth paragraph relates God's providence to the reality of sin in general. It tells us that God is absolutely sovereign with regards to sin yet remains absolutely holy.

Moving on to paragraph 5 there is a more pastoral concern in view as it deals with the question of sin in the lives of God's people.

"The most wise, righteous, and gracious God does often times leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself; and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for other just and holy ends. So that whatsoever befalls any of His elect is by His appointment, for His glory, and their good."

If God in His providence is in control over all things including sin, why does He not remove sin from His people immediately?

Why does God allow us to carry on sinning by withholding gracious influence over our lives?

B. God has good reasons for letting His children sin

1. God is being wise, righteous and gracious when He withholds His influence over our lives and makes it possible for us to carry on sinning.

"The most wise, righteous, and gracious God does often times leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions of their own hearts..."

Because He is wise, we can be sure that He knows what will happen to us as a result of our sin.

Because He is righteous, we can be sure that He is being just and fair as He lets us sin.

Because He is gracious, we can be sure that His purposes for us are good as He allows us to sin.

2. The length of time we struggle with sin and the types of sin we struggle with are in God's hands.

Each believer is tempted in particular ways: the types of sins required for God to do His wise, righteous and gracious work will differ from believer to believer.

Each believer is tempted for a season: the length of time that is required for God to do His wise, righteous and gracious work will differ from believer to believer.

C. What are those good reasons?

1. To train us to be holy.

"...to chastise them for their former sins..."

"God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." (Hebrews 12:10)

2. To reveal our remaining sinfulness so we are not deceived.

"...or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts..."

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12)

3. To humble us.

"...that they may be humbled..."

"But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the LORD's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the LORD's wrath did not come upon them during the days of Hezekiah." (2 Chronicles 32:25-26)

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." (2 Corinthians 12:7)

4. To make us more dependent upon God.

"...and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself..."

"Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:8-9)

5. To keep us watchful.

"...and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin..."

"Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." (Ephesians 5:15-17)

6. To do all that it takes to make us like Christ.

"...and for other just and holy ends. So that whatsoever befalls any of His elect is by His appointment, for His glory, and their good."

"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. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." (Romans 8:28-29)

This does not mean we should sin so that grace abounds or that we can ever justify sinning. No, we should repent of our sin and seek with the help of the Spirit to put it to death.

However, we can be confident that God can use our sin and wickedness for good.

D. How then shall we lead?

1. When members are going through times of trial and suffering, we should encourage them by reminding them of the sovereign goodness of God.

He has not abandoned them.

He is working ALL things for the good of His people.

There is a purpose to what is happening.

2. When members are going through times of trial and suffering, we should encourage them to look for what God might be teaching them.

Is there a sin to be repented of?

Has God's means of grace been neglected?

Are there commands you need to start obeying?

Where is your dependence?

Are there truths about God that you have forgotten or need to learn?

Have you stopped taking sin seriously? Are you putting yourself in dangerous situations?