

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

Providence (5)

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.

Then having dealt with the question of sin in the lives of God's people in paragraph 5, the Confession in the sixth paragraph moves on to look at sin in the lives of the wicked and the ungodly.

"As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as the righteous judge, for former sin does blind and harden; from them He not only withholds His grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their understanding, and wrought upon their hearts; but sometimes also withdraws the gifts which they had, and exposes them to such objects as their corruption makes occasion of sin; and withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, under those means which God uses for the softening of others."

Although God will unleash most of His wrath upon sinners at the day of God's wrath, it is true that a portion of it is being revealed in this life.

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness." (Romans 1:18)

Even now, God is judging sinners for their sins. How is He doing this?

B. God is judging sinners for their sin by blinding and hardening them

1. What does God do?

"As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as the righteous judge, for former sin does blind and harden..."

He blinds sinners so that they are unable to understand spiritual truth.

He hardens sinners so that they are unable to turn to God and trust in Jesus.

"Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him... For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn – and I would heal them." (John 12:37, 39-40)

2. How does God do this?

"...from them He not only withholds His grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their understanding, and wrought upon their hearts; but sometimes also withdraws the gifts which they had, and exposes them to such objects as their corruption makes occasion of sin; and withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan..."

He withholds His grace leaving people to blind and harden themselves by their own sin.

"Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them: Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear." (Deuteronomy 29:2-4)

He withdraws His gifts so that they lose any knowledge of God and His grace which they had.

"He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." (Matthew 13:11-12)

He exposes them to things that lead to sin by removing His protective work upon them.

"But Sihon king of Heshbon refused to let us pass through. For the LORD your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate in order to give him into your hands, as he has now done." (Deuteronomy 2:30)

He gives them over to world, the flesh, and the devil by no longer restraining them in their sinfulness which allows them to do and have what they want.

"But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices." (Psalm 81:11-12)

"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another." (Romans 1:24)

3. God does not blind or harden sinners by increasing the wickedness in their hearts.

No, as it is His right to, He removes His gracious protecting and restraining leaving them to choose what they want.

It is not His fault that they become more sinful.

C. God is judging sinners for their sin using the same means which save His people

1. The means that God uses to judge sinners are the same as those He uses to soften His people and bring them to salvation.

"...whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, under those means which God uses for the softening of others."

The Gospel is a message that both judges and saves.

"Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for." (1 Peter 2:7-8)

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life." (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

The same sun that melts the wax also hardens the clay.

2. As God judges sinners for their sin by blinding and hardening them using the same means which save His people, He is doing this as He does all things, for the good of the church.

That's the point being made by this summary paragraph which closes the chapter.

"As the providence of God does in general reach to all creatures, so after a more special manner it takes care of His church, and disposes of all things to the good thereof."

"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)

D. How then shall we lead?

1. Do not be surprised.

If the society or world around us get more wicked and sinful, it is a sign that God is choosing to withhold and withdraw and allow people to act according to their own sinful desires without His gracious restraints.

2. Do not presume.

That God will in this life always work to protect and restrain the wicked and ungodly.

That you know what the best way for God to providentially take care of His church is.

Say, "Whatever my God ordains is right!"

3. Do not be discouraged.

God knows what He is doing.

God is watching over His people both corporately and individually for their good and His glory.