

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH.

Chapter 5.—*Of Providence.*

III. God in his ordinary Providence maketh use of meanes,¹ yet is free to work without,² above, and against them at his pleasure.³

Question 1.—*Does God in his ordinary Providence make use of means?*

Answer.—Yes. Acts 27:31, 44; Isa. 55:10, 11. Such acts of Providence which utilize ordinary means, we call “common.” Thus, those things of “nature” whereby God effects his plan, fall under this doctrine of Providence. For example, when God’s people were in the desert, he stirred up a south wind which brought an abundance of birds, Ex. 16:13; Num. 11:31. Also, when the Lord would have Jonah cast into the sea, he stirred up a whirlwind, Jon. 1:4. From these examples, we may infer that no wind ever arises but by the express command of the Almighty. Otherwise, it would not be true that “he makes the winds his messengers,” etc., Ps. 104:3, 4.

We may also look to the power of procreation which is “naturally” implanted in man, yet God would have it accounted to his special favour that he leaves some in barrenness, but graces others with offspring, Ps. 113:9; 127:3. For this reason, Jacob said to his wife, “Am I God that I can give you children?” Gen. 30:2.

Again, what could be more “common” or “natural” but to seek nourishment in our daily meat? Yet, the Spirit expressly states that man does not live by bread alone, Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4, because it is not the plenty itself which nourishes a man, but God’s secret blessing, Hos. 2:21, 22. Thus, he threatens to take away that blessing from those who rebel, Isa. 3:1.

In his ordinary providence, God works by means, and according to the general laws established by his own wisdom: we are, therefore, bound to use the means which he has appointed, and if we neglect these, we cannot expect to obtain the end.

Question 2.—*Is God free to work above, without or even against these means, in order to carry out his Providence?*

Answer.—Yes. Rom. 4:19-21; Hos. 1:7; Dan. 3:27. When God carries out his Providence apart from ordinary means, we call these acts “miraculous.” We say that God worketh above ordinary means when he sets aside those limitations which “nature” sets. In the case of Abraham and Sarah, God “miraculously” brought about conception though it had “ceased to be after the manner of women” with Sarah, thereby working *above* means, Rom. 4:19-21. Likewise, this working above is displayed when the shadow of the sundial was set back ten degrees to promise safety to Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20:9-11; Isa. 38:7. God is said to work without means when he accomplishes his purposes apart from those channels usually associated with the carrying out of the actions in view, Job 34:20. For

¹ Acts 27:31, 44; Isa. 55:10, 11; Hos. 2:21, 22.

² Hos. 1:7; Matt. 4:4; Job 34:20.

³ 2 Kings 6:6; Dan. 3:27.

example, God promises to save his people in battle apart from the usual weapons needed to effect victory on the battlefield, Hos. 1:7. A striking confirmation is evinced in the case of Gideon's three hundred soldiers who accomplish the routing of the enemy in a most unusual way, Judg. 7:19-25. To this, the miraculous birth of Jesus is said to occur, not merely above means but without means, Luke 1:34, 35. Finally, we see that God can work against the ordinary means when he causes the clean contrary effect from what nature teaches us to expect, Josh. 10:12, 13. So, what could be more against "nature" than for an axe head to rise when cast into the water? Yet, even this may fall out in the Providence of God, 2 Kings 6:6. What could be more contrary to the nature of things than for a man to walk upon the surface of water, not submerged in it? Yet, this is exactly what Peter did when the Master beckoned him, "Come," Matt. 14:29. The various accounts of raising from the dead all show themselves to be accomplished against means, *cf.* John 11:39-44.

To maintain that the laws of nature are so absolutely fixed, that they can in no case be deviated from, would be to exclude God from the government of the world, to represent the universe as a vast machine, whose movements are regulated by certain laws which even the great Architect cannot control, Mark 4:41.