

## THE CONFESSION OF FAITH.

### Chapter 5.-Of Providence.

VI. As for those wicked and ungodly men, whom God as a righteous Judge, for former sinnes doth blind and harden,<sup>1</sup> from them he not onely withholdeth his grace, whereby they might have been inlightned in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts:<sup>2</sup> but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had,<sup>3</sup> and exposeth them to such objects as their corruption makes occasions of sin:<sup>4</sup> and withall, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan:<sup>5</sup> whereby it comes to passe that they harden themselves, even under those means, which God useth for the softning of others.<sup>6</sup>

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Question 1.—*Doth God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins blind and harden wicked and ungodly men?*

*Answer.*—Yes. Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 11:7, 8. In Scripture, God is frequently said to harden wicked men for their former sins. This he does, not by infusing any wickedness into their hearts, or by any direct and positive influences on their souls in rendering them obdurate, but by withholding his grace, which is necessary to soften their hearts, and which he is free to give or withhold as he pleases. Rom. 9:13-18.

Question 2.—*Doth God, by withholding his grace, remove from the wicked the necessary means to enlighten their understandings and change their hearts?*

*Answer.*—Yes. Deut. 29:4. Men, apart from the grace of God, remain in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, Acts 8:22, 23. When Christ came into the world, the world was already under the condemnation of spiritual darkness, John 3:17-20. Christ himself testifies that no man can come unto him except that the Father give it (*i.e.*, the grace of saving faith) to him to come, John 6:44, 45, 65; Eph. 2:8-10.

Question 3.—*Doth God also withdraw gifts which the wicked formerly possessed in order to their greater judgment?*

*Answer.*—Yes. Matt. 13:12; 25:29. Thus, we see in the case of king Saul, who was endued with spiritual gifts to rule the people of Israel, 1 Sam. 11:6. When Saul fell into sin, God gave him up and removed his Spirit, 1 Sam. 16:14; 18:12.

Question 4.—*Doth God expose wicked men to such objects as their corruption makes occasions to sin?*

*Answer.*—Yes. So, Sihon, king of Heshbon, was hardened by the Lord when God brought his people before him, Deut. 2:30. Instead of making peace with the children of Israel and allowing them safe passage through his land, he was moved to mistreat them by his own choler, Num. 21:23. In so doing, his own corruption provided the justification for the destruction of his people by Israel, even according to the decree and providence of

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 11:7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 29:4.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 13:12; 25:29.

<sup>4</sup> Deut. 2:30; 2 Kings 8:12, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ps. 81:11, 12; 2 Thess. 2:10-12.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 7:3; 8:15, 32; 2 Cor. 2:15, 16; Isa. 8:14; 1 Pet. 2:7, 8; Isa. 6:9, 10; Acts 28:26, 27.

God, Josh. 11:19, 20. Likewise, Hazeal, when elevated to be king of Syria, was given the occasion to do much evil, as the prophet foresaw, 2 Kings 8:12, 13. These men twisted objects which might have been occasions for great good into occasions to sin because of their own native depravity, Mic. 2:1.

Question 5.—*Doth God often give wicked men over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, to further their blindness and hardness?*

*Answer.*—Yes. When men are forward to follow their own hearts' desires and fail to hearken to the voice and counsel of God, then it often comes to pass that God gives them up, Ps. 81:11, 12. Likewise, when men who are favored with the light of true religion do not keep and cherish it, they are often given up to believe even that which is contrary to the truth that they might suffer the just consequences of their undervaluing of God's truth, 2 Thess. 2:10-12. And so, too, with king Saul, 1 Sam. 16:14, wherein God gave over Saul to an evil spirit to torment him for his wickedness.

Question 6.—*Do the wicked so abuse the gifts of God, that apart from his grace, they turn even those things meant for softening of others into occasions to harden themselves?*

*Answer.*—Yes. What is more conducive to the softening of men than the goodness of God, Rom. 2:4; however, in the case of Pharaoh this very goodness becomes the occasion of much hardening, Ex. 7:3; 8:15, 32. What is more designed for the softening of men than the preaching of the Gospel, Acts 2:38; yet, to some it becomes a point of hardening, 2 Cor. 2:15, 16. Again, the sending of Christ was to bring men to God, John 3:16; but to those who are in spiritual darkness, he is appoint of hardening, Isa. 8:14; 1 Pet. 2:7, 8. Thus, by their own wickedness they misuse, misunderstand and misapply even the very means of grace and turn them to their own destruction, Isa. 6:9, 10; Acts 28:26, 27.