

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH.

Chapter 5.-Of Providence.

VII. As the providence of God doth, in generall, reach to all Creatures; so after a most special manner, it taketh care of his Church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.¹

Question 1.—*May the providence of God be considered as “general” and as “special?”*

Answer—Yes. 1 Tim 4:10. God’s providence in all things may be considered under this twofold aspect.

Question 2.—*Wherein consists this “general” providence of God?*

Answer.—The “general” providence of God is exercised about all of his creatures, 1 Tim. 4:10; Ps. 104:24. The general providence of God, embracing and dealing with every creature according to its nature, consequently, although one system, embraces several subordinate systems intimately related as parts of one whole, yet also distinct in their respective methods of administration and in the immediate ends designed, Ps. 36:6. Solomon doth reconcile with ease the purposes of men with the providence of God. For as he laughs to scorn the folly of those who boldly undertake to do anything apart from the Lord, as though they were not ruled by his hand, Prov. 21:30, 31; in another place he speaks in this manner “The heart of man purposeth his way, but the Lord doth direct his steps.” Prov. 16:9. By which saying he intends us to understand that we are not hindered by the eternal decrees of God, but that under his will we may both provide for ourselves, and dispose all things belonging to us, Phil. 2:13.

This general providence consists in a providential governance of the material universe, Heb. 1:3; which is in and by Christ, Col. 1:17. Then, there is his moral government over the whole of the intelligent creation, Heb. 1:7; whereby they, too, are made to serve another end, Gen. 3:24. Again, there is a moral government of God over the whole family of man, Ps. 76:10; whereby even wicked men are made to serve another end, Acts 2:23. Finally, there is the special gracious dispensation of God’s providence towards his church, Jer. 30:11; this is most properly called his “special” providence.

Question 3.—*Wherein consists the “special” providence of God?*

Answer.—The “special” providence of God is exercised, in a particular manner, about his church and people, 2 Chron. 16:9; Amos 9:8, 9. God has the interests of his own people ever in view and he conducts all the affairs of this world, whether good or evil, prosperous or adverse, to co-operate in the promotion of their good, Isa. 43:3-5, 14. The providential government of God over mankind in general is subordinate as a means to an end to his gracious providence toward his Church, whereby he gathers it out of every people and nation, and makes all things work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose, and of course for the highest development and glory of the whole body, Jer. 33:24-26. The history of redemption through all its dispensations, Patriarchal, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Christian, is the key to the philosophy of human history in general, Rom. 8:28.

¹ 1 Tim. 4:10; Amos 9:8, 9; Rom. 8:28; Isa. 43:3-5, 14.

Question 4.—*Will there always be a Church upon earth?*

Answer—Yes. Christ has so promised, Matt. 16:18. This is also evident in Matt. 28:20, wherein Christ promises his assistance to his people until the end of the earth, Ps. 72:19. Additionally, this is confirmed by Christ's kingly office, Matt. 21:5. As our king, he sets up a kingdom which shall overthrow the kingdoms of the earth, Dan. 2:44; Rev. 11:15. And, this reign shall continue until he has conquered all his and our enemies, 1 Cor. 15:25, 26.

Question 5.—*Hath God at all times, in ages past, watched over his Church with peculiar and unremitting care?*

Answer—Yes. Rom. 8:28. Although he has sometimes permitted her to be reduced to a very low condition, 1 Kings 19:10; yet he has also wrought surprising deliverances in her behalf, Ex. 14:13-31. In fact, often the very means which her enemies intended for her destruction and ruin have, by an overruling Providence, been rendered subservient to her edification and enlargement, Acts 8:4; Est. 7. The preservation of the Church, in spite of the craft and malice of hell, Matt. 16:18, and of all the pernicious errors, 1 Cor. 11:19, and bloody persecutions which have threatened her ruin, Acts 12:1, 21-24, is no less wonderful than the spectacle which Moses beheld, a bush burning but not consumed, Ex. 3:2. We may take great comfort and rejoice in Christ's promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church, Matt. 16:18.