

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH.

Chapter 5.-Of Providence.

II. Although, in relation to the fore-knowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to passe immutably, and infallibly:¹ yet by the same Providence, he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.²

Question 1.—*In relation to the fore-knowledge and decree of God, do all things come to pass immutably and infallibly?*

Answer.—Yes. Acts 2:23. Scripture is clear that God worketh “all things” according to the counsel of his own will, Eph. 1:11. Paul tells us that every thing is bound together by his power, Col. 1:17. Christ himself is said to uphold the entire created order by his word, Heb. 1:3.

Question 2.—*Has this same Providence ordered these things to fall out according to the nature of secondary causes?*

Answer.—Yes. For example, believers are said to will according as God works in them, Phil. 2:12, 13; Eph. 2:10. Also, the wrath of man, that is, the wicked actions of men, are turned to carry out his glorious purpose in the earth, Ps. 76:10; Acts 2:23; 4:27-29.

Question 3.—*Do these things fall out, either necessarily, freely or contingently?*

Answer.—Yes. They fall out necessarily in those cases wherein the Lord establishes a cause and effect relationship. Gen. 8:22 ascribes permanency of seasonal change as long as the earth remains, *cf.* Jer. 31:35. Secondly, Scripture in many places asserts that free and voluntary things, which are in our power and are done with purpose, are governed by Providence. Thus, we are told that the Lord sets a man’s heart and puts the very words in his mouth, Prov. 16:1; the Lord directs his way, Prov. 16:9; God controls the inclinations of the king’s heart, Prov. 21:1; we are informed that a man’s ways—his actions, habits, *etc.*—flow from outside of himself, Jer. 10:23. Indeed, God is said to “fashion” the hearts of all men, Ps. 33:14, 15. This we see clearly in the examples of Laban, Gen. 31:29; Esau, Gen. 33:4; the Egyptians, Ex. 12:36; Balaam, Num. 22, 23; Saul, 1 Sam. 24:15, 18; 26:17; and others. Thirdly, Scripture in many places asserts that contingent and fortuitous events fall under providence. Nothing is more contingent than the killing of a man by a woodcutter contrary to his own intention, and yet this is ascribed to God, who is said to deliver him into the hand of the slayer, Ex. 21:12, 13; Deut. 19:4*f.* Nothing is more casual and fortuitous than lots, and yet their falling out is referred to God himself, Prov. 16:33. Nothing was more contingent than the selling of Joseph and his incarceration and exaltation, yet Joseph himself testifies that these were all ordered in the Providence of God, Gen. 50:20. Innumerable similar events, plainly contingent and fortuitous, are expressly ascribed to Providence, Gen. 22:8, 13; 24:12, 13*ff.*; Gen. 27:20; Prov. 21:31; Matt. 10:29, 30, *etc.* We must remember that God, who works all in all, so governs and rules secondary causes as not to take away their nature and condition.

¹ Acts 2:23.

² Gen. 8:22; Jer. 31:35; Ex. 21:13; Deut. 19:5 w/1 Kings 22:28, 34; Isa. 10:6, 7.

Rather he keeps, conserves and permits them also to exercise and act out their own motions, 1 Kings 22:28, 34.

Question 4.—*How can this Providential concurrence of God be reconciled with the contingency and liberty of second causes—especially the will of man?*

Answer.—Since Providence does not concur with the human will, either by coercion (compelling the unwilling will) or by determining it physically (as a brute and blind thing without judgment), but rationally (by turning the will in a manner suitable to itself), that it may determine itself as the proximate cause of its own actions by the proper judgment of reason and the spontaneous election of the will so that it does no violence to our will but rather kindly cherishes it, *cf.* 1 Kings 22:20, 21. These two are the only kinds of necessity which destroy liberty and are incompatible with it: natural and coercive necessity. The others (arising from God's decree and the motion of the first cause or from the object and last judgment of the practical intellect) so far from overwhelming liberty, rather defend it, because they turn, do not compel, the will and make it willing from unwilling, *cf.* Ex. 4:21; 10:27; 14:4. For whoever does spontaneously what he wills from a judgment of reason and a full consent of will cannot help doing that freely even if he does it necessarily, Isa. 10:6, 7.