

Ps. 73:1-28 (WCF 5:4-7) “Surely God Is Good to Israel!”

For the Children: Imagine if you saw some kids jumping off some rocks into a river or the sea, and you badly wanted to do the same. Your parents said, “No, it’s too dangerous!” You were angry that they wouldn’t let you do what the others were doing. Then you saw someone jump off, hit some rocks, and end up with a very bad injury. Then you’d feel pretty silly for wanting to do what they were doing! Sometimes God’s children see those who hate Him having fun, being successful, rich and happy. They think, “Why does God not treat ME that way?” Later, they see how all the money and things have kept the unbeliever away from God, and ended in hell for him. Then they realize how foolish it was to wish they could have a life like that.

Questions: How does God use the unbeliever’s “success” against him? Does God rule over sin, or just the good things in life? How does God use sin, as well as suffering, to help His children?

Introduction:

First Point: Providence and the Wicked

- 1) **Asaph’s Struggle:** Asaph struggled with the observation that the wicked often prosper. They often seem to avoid pain and trouble, live to a ripe old age, even increasing in “fatness.” This is even so with those who are overtly wicked and rebellious – who wear their pride and aggression like clothes; openly mock God and His people; encourage oppression; and speak in pride as if they were higher than God in heaven. Asaph’s problem was 2-fold: envy of the prosperity of the wicked; and the feeling of unfairness and doubt in a “sleeping” Providence
- 2) **A Realized Mistake:** Asaph comes to realize that his feelings are senseless and ignorant. He sees that such an attitude betrays the covenant-community – for envy, bitterness and doubt are an evil leaven. He realized his error when he came into God’s Presence in the Sanctuary and was confronted by God’s Word – the only place that tells us the “end” of the wicked. God will certainly “awaken” His wrath and dispel the illusion of prosperity of the wicked by His judgement. Their ease is actually a “slippery slope” that leads to complacency and so to destruction
- 3) **A Confessional Explanation:** WCF 5:4,6 tell us that far from “sleeping,” God’s Providence bounds, orders, and governs all sin for God’s glory – all without any evil on God’s part. He places the wicked in situations where their own corruption causes them to sin; and gives them over to their own hard hearts, the temptations of the world and to Satan’s power. Grace is withheld so they remain in this blindness. That very wakeful Providence is why Asaph sees the wicked appearing to prosper. But it is not softness, it the *withholding* of mercy - nothing enviable at all!

Second Point: Providence and the Righteous

- 1) **Goodness to Israel:** In v. 1 Asaph confesses the Lord’s goodness to His church and to believers. See WCF 5:7. That goodness includes: the Lord keeping us constantly with Him (v. 23); holding us by the hand and guiding us with His counsel (vss. 23-24); receiving us in glory (v. 24); being our strength, portion (v. 26) and refuge in trouble (v. 28); all because of Christ. However, like Asaph believers also experience the Lord’s frequent chastening (v. 14)
- 2) **Further Confessional Explanation:** WCF 5:5 explains some of the reasons why this chastening, like other trials and tribulations, are for our good: to correct us of sins; to humble us as we see how much sin remains in us; to make us depend more on the Lord; to make us more vigilant against sin; or some other good reason. Since we don’t know the detailed outcomes, we should trust that these or other good outcomes will arise in time
- 3) **Asaph’s Conclusion:** In the end, Asaph realizes that it doesn’t matter what we lose or lack, so long as we have the Lord, who is our true portion/inheritance. All else, including the flesh and heart of man, will fail anyway. We should desire nothing on earth so much as we do Him (v. 25). See also Jn. 6:68. The nearness of God is our greatest good, envy and bitterness and doubt will not come so close. This is a point on which we need to remind each other

Conclusion: