

**The 1689 Confession of Faith, Chapter 5 – “Of Divine Providence”, Session # 13 –
“God’s Special Care of His Church”, Presented by Pastor Paul Rendall
in the Adult Sunday School Class, on May 12th, 2019.**

Paragraph 7 – As the providence of God doth in general reach to all creatures, so after a more special manner it taketh care of his z)church, and disposes of all things to the good thereof.

z) 1st Timothy 4: 10; Amos 9: 8-9; Isaiah 43: 3-5

1st Timothy 4: 10 – “For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God (we have hoped in the living God, it says in the King James), who is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe.”

We are now drawing near the end of our study of Divine Providence; having covered a good many subjects in relation to it. Today we want to speak about God’s special providence towards His people; His Church. God not only governs all men and all nations in a general way, but He governs them with particular purposes in mind in relation to the kingdom of His dear Son. God is the Savior of all men in a general sense, but He the Savior especially, it says here, of those who believe in Him; those who trust in Him for their salvation, and to guide and direct them in this life away from sin and into all righteousness in relation to His word. The word “Savior” here is σωτηρ and it means that God is the One who “preserves” all men. He keeps them in life and upholds them in their being all through their life until His purpose in relation to them is complete. Calvin says – “He means that the kindness of God extends to all men. And if there is no man who does not feel the goodness of God towards him, and who is not a partaker of it, how much more shall it be experienced by the godly, who hope in Him?” “Will He not take peculiar care of them?” “Will he not more freely pour out His bounty on them?” “In a word, will He not, in every respect, keep them safe to the end?” (end of quote) No doubt, He will.

1. Let’s begin by thinking together of God’s providence in relation to being separated unto salvation.

Galatians 1: 11-16 – “But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood...”

Now, you will notice here that the gospel which Paul received was not according to man. He did not receive it from man, nor was he taught it, but it came to him through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul’s conversion to Christ was one of the most dramatic conversions in all of human history, and it was dramatic in the way that it is related here, for a very good reason. It is to show us that conversion to Christ is ultimately God’s work and not the decision of person according to their own free will, in every case. Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus when Paul was fighting against Him and all of His disciples. He was persecuting the church of God beyond measure and trying to destroy it. He was on that very business on the day when the Lord chose to reveal Himself to Paul. His salvation took place, as it says here, “when it pleased God”. Actually, we are told, God separated Paul from his mother’s womb, from before he was born he was set apart to salvation and to all that he would do for God, and then many years later, on a particular day, God called him through His grace, to reveal His Son in Paul, so that he might preach Him among the Gentiles. All of this is God’s loving providential work which displayed His everlasting love for Paul, even when he was a sinner, even from before he was born, God had this great purpose in salvation which would be displayed in him. The same is true for all that

are called by God unto salvation; although not so dramatic as Paul's conversion was, yet nevertheless, all of the acts of salvation are most certainly displayed in the conversion of any sinner, as being His handiwork, and according to His purposes.

Albert Barnes says – “It does not follow that because a young man has gone far astray; and has become even a blasphemer and a persecutor, that God has not destined him to some important and holy work in his service.” “How many people have been called, like Paul, and Newton, and Bunyan, and Augustine, from a life of sin to the service of God.” “We should never despair of a young man who has wandered far from God.” “If he has risen high in attainments; if his whole aim is ambition; or if he has become an infidel, still we are not to despair of him.” “It is still possible that God “separated” that talent to his service from his very birth, and that God still means to call it all to His service.” “How easy it was to convert Saul of Tarsus when the proper period arrived.” “So it is of the now unconverted and unconsecrated, but cultivated talent among the young men of our land.” “Far as they may have wandered from God and virtue, yet much of that talent has been devoted to Him (Barnes says “in baptism, and”) by parental purposes and prayers; and, it may be – as is morally certain from the history of the past – that much of it is consecrated also by the divine purpose and intention for the noble cause of virtue and pure religion.” “In that now apparently wasted talent; in that learning now apparently devoted to other aims and ends, there is much that may still adorn the cause of virtue and religion; and how fervently we should pray that it may be “called” by the grace of God and actually devoted to His service.”

2. Let's think about God's Providence in relation to the calling of His saints.

2nd Timothy 1: 8-10 – “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.”

You can see here that it is a good thing when Christians are not ashamed of the testimony of Christ. They also should not be ashamed of Paul as a prisoner of men. (He actually calls himself the prisoner of the Lord at another point.) Rather we should anticipate sharing in the sufferings for the gospel, according to the power of God. This means that if we do suffer for the gospel we will receive power from Christ to do so from Him, to endure the things that men might do to us for our identifying ourselves with Him and His righteous cause. For He has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His purpose and grace which was given to us in Him before time began. There is a purpose for every person who saved, and an appointment to the works that they will do by God Himself.

1st Timothy 1: 12-16 – “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” “And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” “However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”

What was it that Paul says about his salvation and the ministry which the Lord gave him? He thanks Christ Jesus our Lord who enabled him to become a Christian and to become a minister; he who was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent man. He obtained mercy because he did these things ignorant of who Christ was; that is, the Son of God who came to bring salvation to sinners, and particularly to him. Although he was the chief of sinners, yet he came to know that the grace of the Lord Jesus was exceeding abundant, along with the graces of faith and love which are in Christ, but given to us by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ called Paul in order that He might show all longsuffering to him, and that he would become a pattern of that longsuffering to those who are going to believe on Him for

everlasting life. This pattern is seen in his being a great sinner, and yet God had mercy upon Him according to His own purpose and grace toward Paul. This same kind of mercy is shown to all those called by God unto salvation, and the same graces of faith and love are given to everyone called by God unto salvation, being granted to them by the giving of the Holy Spirit.