

**The 1689 Confession of Faith, Chapter 5 – “Of Divine Providence”, Session # 12 –
“Loyalty & Reliance on the Lord”, Presented in the Adult Sunday School Class,
and presented by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 5th, 2019.**

Paragraph 5 – The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, p)that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself; and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for other just and holy ends. So that whatsoever befalls any of his elect is by his appointment, for his glory, q)and their good.

p) 2nd Chronicles 32: 25-26,31; 2nd Corinthians 12: 7-9; q) Romans 8: 28

Thus far I have tried to carefully explain to you in past sessions what our Confession is saying when it says that the most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions and deceitfulness of their hearts. He leaves them for a season; He draws back from them and is not “with” them for a time, for very good reasons which are a part of their sanctification; their becoming more holy even as God is holy. He does this so that they may be humbled for their past sins, and that He might raise them up to a more close and constant dependence upon Himself and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin. And then, it says, “And for other just and holy ends”. And then this further explanatory statement – “So that whatsoever befalls any of His elect is by His appointment, for His glory, and their good.”

I have been trying to illustrate these phrases at the end of Paragraph 5 by having you turn to 2nd Chronicles chapters 14, 15, and 16 to consider how a number of good principles of righteousness were fleshed out in the life of king Asa. I want you to understand that in the heart and life of any Christian there are many things in righteousness which they must learn to do. But they must learn to do them by relying on the Lord. There are many things that the Lord must deal with in relation to our learning to practice righteousness, in order that they might become holy; many lessons of truth related to being righteous which need to be worked through. This is illustrated in a wonderful way for us in these chapters.

The 1st Principle of righteousness is that a good man will do righteous deeds by seeking help from God.

1st Kings 15: 11-14 – “And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did David his father.” “And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made.” “And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook Kidron.” “But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa’s heart was perfect with the LORD all his days.” (KJV)

2nd Chronicles 14: 1-7, and 11 - “So Abijah rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the City of David. Then Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet for ten years. Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God, for he removed the altars of the foreign gods and the high places, and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images. He commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment.” “He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah, and the kingdom was quiet under him.” “And he built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest; he had no war in those years, because the Lord had given him rest.” “Therefore he said to Judah, ‘Let us build these cities and make walls around them, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us, because we have sought the Lord our God; we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side.’” “So they built and prospered.”

We observed that king Asa was a good man. He did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. This is something that is also true in a general overall sense in the life of anyone who truly knows the Lord because they have been given a new heart in regeneration. If they have been taught the good way of the Lord, like Asa was by his father Abijah, and when they then seek the Lord for themselves, He is then at work in them, “both to will and to do according to His good pleasure”, as it says in Philippians 2: 13. He will lead them to do what is good and right when they seek Him. Asa, it says, not only sought the Lord for himself, but he took it a step further as a king. It says in verse 4 that he commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment. He removed the false worship of his fathers, which the kings before him had set up. And in verse 5 it says that the kingdom was quiet under him.

The 2nd Principle of righteousness is that the Lord is with you while you are with Him.

2nd Chronicles 15: 1-9 – “Now the Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, ‘Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD is with you when you are with Him.’ “And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.” “For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law.” “But in their distress they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him.” “In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands.” “Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress.” “But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work.” “Now when Asa heard these words and the prophecy which Azariah the son of Oded the prophet spoke, he took courage and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. He then restored the altar of the LORD which was in front of the porch of the LORD.” “He gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon who resided with them, for many defected to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.”

Amaziah the son of Oded was teaching them that if they would be strong in faith in God and strong in seeking God, which is what it mean to be “with” Him, then God would be with them, and their work would be rewarded, he says in verse 7. And the same will be true for us as well. The Lord will be with us if we are with Him; that is filled with His Spirit, seeking Him for more of the Holy Spirit and grace to do His will, and grace to do and keep His commandments. We saw how Asa responded in an excellent way to this exhortation in verse 8 – “And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Obed the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the Lord that was before the vestibule of the Lord.” “Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw the Lord his God was with him.” I said to you that this is Divine Providence and Divine concursus. This is how reformation comes to the Church of Jesus Christ today. It is not simply by the recovery of sound doctrine, although that is absolutely necessary. But it is just as much related to whether it will be revealed to people; the fact that God is with the person who is making the reformation in the church, or trying to bring back the nation to walk in the fear of God.

The words in verse 2 which say – “If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you,” are interesting. Does God ever forsake one that He has chosen and called unto salvation? Does He forsake the one who belongs to Him when they fall into sin? I want you to understand from the Scriptures that He does not, even though by the circumstances that a true Christian may be going through and their apparent lack of repentance in a timely fashion may make you think that they are not a true Christian, yet God is still dealing with them, all the way through their life, and even unto death. The word – “Forsake” in the original Hebrew is aw-zab. It means to loosen; to relinquish and permit, fail, forsake, fortify, help, leave (destitute or off), or refuse. Quite a large amount of possible meaning. We should understand that there are different uses and senses in which this word should be understood. In Psalm 71: 18 it says – “Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not

until I have showed Thy strength unto this generation, and Thy power to every one that is to come.” This was spoken by David and he speaking about God’s “forsaking” in death; not spiritually.

Here in 2nd Chronicles 15: 2 it means that if you will seek him he will be found of you, and you will enjoy his favor and have His presence, and help from him in every time of need. But if you forsake Him; that is His laws and service, He will forsake you; and leave you to fall into the hands of your enemies. (Gill) It is not speaking of God’s forsaking any true believer, any person that He has set His everlasting love upon, or caused them to be born again. And this we shall see in the case of Asa who later in his life failed the Lord badly. 1st Chronicles 15: 14 says – “But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa’s heart was perfect with the LORD all his days.” The word “perfect” is shaw-lame in the Hebrew. He does not mean absolutely perfect but it means loyal. Asa had a loyal heart all of his days. And this leads us to –

The 3rd Principle of Righteousness is a heart which is loyal to God and relies on the Lord.

2nd Chronicles 16: 1-13 – “In the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s reign Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and fortified Ramah in order to prevent anyone from going out or coming in to Asa king of Judah.” “Then Asa brought out silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and the king’s house, and sent them to Ben-Hadad king of Aram, who lived in Damascus, saying, ‘Let there be a treaty between you and me, as between my father and your father.’” “Behold, I have sent you silver and gold; go, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so that he will withdraw from me.” “So Ben-Hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim and all the store cities of Naphtali.” “When Baasha heard of it, he ceased fortifying Ramah and stopped his work.” “Then King Asa brought all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber with which Baasha had been building, and with them he fortified Geba and Mizpah.” “At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, ‘Because you have relied on the king of Aram and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand.’” “Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen?” “Yet because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand.” “For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.” “You have acted foolishly in this.” “Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.” “Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him for this.” “And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time.” “Now, the acts of Asa from first to last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.” “In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet.” “His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians.” “So Asa slept with his fathers, having died in the forty-first year of his reign.”

This is truly an amazing thing; a man who had made so much progress in holiness, now backsliding and falling to worldly ways of dealing with his difficulties which came to his kingdom and himself. Instead of seeking the Lord and relying on the Lord, he sought help from the Syrian king, choosing to give him silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the Lord and the king’s house. He felt he had to rob the treasuries of the house of God in order to bribe the king of Syria, to go and break his treaty with Baasha, king of Israel, so that he could supposedly gain an advantage over him. The Lord has to send Asa Hanani the seer to tell him that he had not relied on the Lord but upon his own supposed wisdom. Asa’s heart was evidently not completely loyal to the Lord at this particular point in time. (He was not relying on the Lord’s help) at this time, and as a result he acted foolishly.

But, let us take this beautiful statement of verse 9 to heart – “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” These words show us the Lord’s perfect discernment in the searching out what is in the hearts of His people. He knows whether the root of the matter is in them or not, but He also knows when there may be a number of things that that believer is not willing to deal with in their heart until they are forced to it. God shows Himself strong on their behalf, even so. The word, “loyal”, is once again here – shaw-lame

meaning whole or complete or loyal; once again translated “perfect” in the King James. Did this mean that Asa did not know the Lord when he fell into these mistakes in judgment regarding how he ought lead the country; that because he did not rely upon the Lord as he had before when the Ethiopians came up against him, and the Lord helped him and Judah defeated them, that he did not know the Lord? No, this is not the case, but it is very disturbing because when the Lord sent the prophet Hanani to reprove him over it, he did not receive the reproof but instead he persecuted and jailed the prophet, and oppressed some of the people for a time. And these were believing people no doubt. The second incident of his having diseased feet and his not seeking the Lord, but only the physicians is also disturbing. Why would he draw back from doing the will of the Lord and walking closely with Him?

I believe that we need to from this incident that it is possible for a Christian not to end well in living their life unto God. This does not necessarily mean that they are not a Christian, for God was working with him and the testimony of the Scriptures is that he was loyal all of his days, and that he was a good man. He came into circumstances in which the Lord was testing him and leaving him to himself to prove to him what was in his heart. And that proved that he needed to change and repent of his attitude of frustrated independence. He did not take to heart these principles of righteousness to do them at this particular point, and thus he left himself unprotected, and he spiritually fell from his steadfastness for this time. Let us understand that the Lord knows how to deal with all of His elect people, and knows what to bring to them for their good to teach them all of what they need to learn. Sometimes even true Christians are stubborn learners, for whom it takes great patience on God’s part to teach them what they need to learn. Sometimes they even go to their deaths not responding rightly to all that God would have them to learn. “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: The Lord knows those who are His, and let everyone who names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity. (2nd Timothy 2: 19) A true Christian will depart from iniquity.

But we must also realize that there is a difference between not persevering in the faith, and being faithless at certain points. This is what good king Asa fell into. It says in 2nd Timothy 11-13 – “For if we died with him, we shall also live with him.” “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us.” “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” Let us see how God is the best of teachers to His dear people, so that whatever He ordains for them, all that will befall His elect, will be for their good. King Asa, it says in 2nd Chronicles 16: 12, “became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; et in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians.” This was not a good thing, and it was indicative of the fact that he had not sufficiently learned the lesson of relying on the Lord, the way that he should have. Let us understand that even though Asa did not end as well as he should have, he did not perish in his sins, for God had saved him, and He had given him grace all of his life since his conversion in his early years. Let us see that true perseverance is related to your ultimate loyalty to God being fixed, at the time of your conversion to Christ, and that if you do not do as well as God commands that you do, that this will not be fatal to your going to heaven, or having everlasting life because it is God’s effectual work in your soul which saves you. You do not ultimately keep your own soul; He does. And He will teach even stubborn learners among Christians like Asa or Jonah, and no doubt many others, without damning them for their not having relied upon Him, or listened to Him at certain points. Thanks be to God that this is so.

Think of these things in terms of what Paul says concerning the Lord’s Supper in 1st Corinthians 11: 27-32.

“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” “For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.” “But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”

I believe that the Lord disciplined king Asa to the point of his death, that he might save him from himself and his sins, in the end. He became weak and sick and finally he slept; he died. But he did not perish, for in his heart of hearts, he was still loyal to the Lord, and the Lord was faithful to him, even when he was faithless.