

## The Baptist Confession of Faith

### Chapter 5

#### Doctrine of Divine Providence

1. God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom, upholds, directs, disposes and governs all creatures and things.

It is without apology that the Christian faith asserts the absolute sovereignty of God. In the person of Jesus Christ we find the One who created all things and who, in the end became the Savior of souls.

- *Hebrews 1:3 [It is Christ] Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;*

The power of God to direct and govern His universe is declared by God Himself to Job in a series of questions. Job was asked where he was at the beginning of time when God said to the waters

- *Job 38:11 Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?*

The nation of Israel was reminded of the absolute sovereignty of God and His governing providence.

- *Isaiah 46:10-11 [It is God and no one else who is found] Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: 11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it [saith the Lord].*

The Psalmist told the people of Israel

- *Psalms 135:6 Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.*

From the greatest to the least [God's providential care is present].

- *Matthew 10:29 [Teaching on the providence of God, Jesus said] Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

By His most wise and holy providence, to the end for which they were created [God rules over all].

God governs according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and unchanging counsel of His own will.

For the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, boundless goodness, and mercy [our God reigns].

The greatest praise that will ever come to God showing forth all of the divine attributes is in the salvation of souls.

- *Ephesians 1:11 [Realizing this the Apostle Paul reminds believers that it is in Christ] In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*

2. Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, Who is the First Cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly.

Even the death of deaths in the death of Christ came about due to the foreknowledge and decree of the Father.

- *Acts 2:23 [On the day of Pentecost, filled with the Holy Spirit, Peters speaks of] Him, [Christ] being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*

Nothing happens to anyone by chance, or outside His providence.

- *Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.*

By His providence He [God] orders events to occur according to the nature of second causes, necessarily, freely, or contingently. The Lord directs even the weather.

- *Genesis 8:22 [Following the flood God made that promise to Noah that] While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

What we call the Laws of Nature are really expressions of divine faithfulness. Whatever happens within the established boundaries out of necessity, freely, or contingently happens within the sphere of God's providence.

3. God, in His ordinary providence makes use of means [as the story of Paul's shipwreck as a political prisoner demonstrates].

- *Acts 27:31 [Knowing that the ship was going to be destroyed] Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.*

As Paul had been shown, the ship was wrecked though all that were on board were saved. Following the breaking of the ship those on board were cast into the water and had to swim for shore.

- *Acts 27:44 [Some were good swimmers and made it to shore easily] And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship [had to struggle to safety]. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*

The fact that God, in ordinary providence makes use of means has been taught to every spiritual generation. In the seventh century before Christ the prophet Isaiah observed the divine faithfulness of God in nature to sustain mankind.

- *Isaiah 55:10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:*

[Though God ordinarily works through means] yet He is free to work outside [them].

- *Hosea 1:7 But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen. [God will save His people by the power of His might.]*

[Though God ordinarily works through means] yet He is free to work above [them] as He did in the case of Abraham. Though an old man, Abraham was going to have a son.

- *Romans 4:19-21 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:*

[Though God ordinarily works through means] yet He is free to work against [them] as He did in the case of those who tried to kill Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego.

- *Daniel 3:27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.*

[It is] at His pleasure [God works all things].

3. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so manifest themselves in His providence, that His determinate counsel extends even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions of both angels and men.

- *Romans 11:32 For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. 33O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! 34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?*

- *2 Samuel 24:1 And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.*
- *2 Kings 19:28 Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.*

This is not merely by a bare permission, but by a form of permission in which He included the most wise and powerful limitations and other means of restricting and controlling sin.

- *2 Kings 19:28 Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.*
- *Psalms 76:10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*

These various limitations have been designed by God to bring about his most holy purposes.

- *Genesis 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*
- *Isaiah 10:6 I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. 7 Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. Isaiah 10:12 Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks.*

Yet, in all these affairs, the sinfulness of both angels and men comes only from them and not from God, Who is altogether holy and righteous, and can never be the author or approver of sin.

- *Psalms 50:21 These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.*
- *1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

4. The most wise, righteous, and gracious God often leaves, for a time, His own children to various temptations, and to the corruptions of their own hearts, in order to chastise them for the sins which they have committed, or to show them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness still in their hearts, so that they may be humbled and aroused to a more close and constant dependence upon Himself for their support, and that they may be made more watchful against future occasions of sin. Other just and holy objectives are also served by such action by God.
- *2 Chronicles 32:25 But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. 26 Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.*
  - *2 Chronicles 32:31 Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.*
  - *2 Chronicles 12:7 And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. 8 Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries. 9 So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made.*

Therefore whatever happens to any of His elect is by His appointment, for His glory, and for their good.

- *Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*
6. As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God as a righteous judge, blinds and hardens for former sin,
- *Romans 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;*

- *Romans 11:7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded 8 (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.*

from them He not only withholds His grace, by which they might have been enlightened in their understanding and affected in their hearts,

- *Deuteronomy 29:4 Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.*

but sometimes He also withdraws the gifts which they had

- *Matthew 13:12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*

and exposes them to certain objects which their corrupt state will make the occasion of sin.

- *Deuteronomy 2:30 But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day.*
- *2 Kings 8:12 And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. 13 And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.*

God gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan,

- *Psalms 81:11 But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. 12 So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.*
- *2 Thessalonians 2:10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: 12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

so that eventually they harden themselves under the same influences which God uses for the softening of others.

- *Exodus 8:15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.*
- *Exodus 8:32 And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.*

- *Isaiah 6:9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.*
  - *1 Peter 2:7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.*
7. As the providence of God in general reaches to all creatures, so, in a more special manner, it takes care of His church, and governs all things to the good of His church.
- *1 Timothy 4:10 For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.*
  - *Amos 9:8 Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the LORD. 9 For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.*
  - *Isaiah 43:3 For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. 4 Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. 5 Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west;*