

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenant Duties, Part 3)

"[P]ublic, social covenanting, is an ordinance of God, obligatory on churches and nations under the New Testament."—Fourth Term of Communion.

Question 1.—*What are the duties the people of God owe to civil governments not sanctioned by the Divine authority?*

Answer.—The people of God have not always, indeed even seldom, in His providence, been privileged to live under civil governments sanctioned by the high authority of Christ, Isa. 10:1-3. In these unfavorable circumstances how ought they to conduct themselves towards those who rule over them? Joel 2:17. Ought they to join themselves with the peoples of the lands wherein they dwell, in supporting thrones of iniquity? Ps. 94:20. Since the enjoyment of outward privileges, such as protection of life and property, brings one under obligations, which may be acknowledged without the recognition of any attribute of a government, Acts 25:3, 11; or even with a dissent from its enactments and constitution of evil, Rev. 13:2; these obligations, of living at peace with all men, in giving scope wisely and consistently to every good law, and in paying of dues lawful in themselves, they ought to acknowledge, Acts 25:8; Rom. 13:7. Even in cases where the imposts of such a government are so combined, as that it may be difficult or impossible to distinguish between what is required for lawful, and what for unlawful purposes, they will not withhold their contributions, but protest against the sinful uses to which the revenues of the nation may be put, Neh. 9:36, 37. Moreover, it is lawful of two evils of suffering to choose the least, so that it is lawful to part with some money even to a robber or murderer to save life, Jer. 41:8. However, when, by direct contribution or otherwise, this is required to support or countenance measures which are sinful, or to give a pledge of loyalty by oath, or otherwise, to systems immoral or unscriptural, accounting it better to obey God rather than men, this ought to be refused at all hazard, Acts 24:26; Est. 3:2; Dan. 6:10. And when privileges, ensnaring in their nature, and in the acceptance of which is an implied acknowledgement of such governments, are held out to them, reflecting that the oaths sworn and the various other public actions performed by the representatives of the people, are accepted in the name of the government and the people, and are attributable to both, and that those who bear rule, are in general viewed as pledged to promote the system for which they act, Christians ought conscientiously to reject such privileges, Heb. 11:24-26. To the system of government, under which the unlawful authority of the rulers is homologated by the servile acquiescence of a majority of the people, a minority, seeking to obey God instead, are not bound to yield subjection, 2 Chron. 19:2. The laws of a nation, only when they accord with the statutes of Scripture, confer obligation, 2 Kings 18:6; and no acts of men can annul the demands of statutes formed according to His Word, and consequently deriving their authority from Him, Isa. 33:22.

Rulers greatly miscalculate when they reckon as apparent submission which without hypocrisy is given to their laws, by those who deny their power to legislate to be of Divine authority, 1 Tim. 1:8-10. Such proceeds neither from wrath, that is, fear of their wrath, nor from a conscientious sense of obligation to obey them, Rom. 3:8. To do what unqualified rulers command is one thing; to do that from a regard to their pretended authority may be

another, Prov. 29:2. The sentiment is wrong, that a thing may be done for wrath, which cannot be done for conscience's sake, Eccl. 8:2. The acts done under incompetent rulers, by those who disapprove of their claims, come from neither the dread of the power of those to inflict a penalty, nor from an approving regard of their claims to authority, but proceeds from the fear of the wrath of God, and from conscience of duty to Him, Acts 4:18, 19. Wicked commands cannot be obeyed at all, Acts 5:29. An act performed for wrath is not lawfully done if not done for conscience sake also, Rom. 13:5; and no service that men do under an unlawful government should proceed from either of these, in reference to those in power, Prov. 28:15. Such rulers act as if the doing of what they require were obedience to them; but, when their demands are lawful in themselves, the performance of them, should neither be made nor received as obedience to them, but rendered as service to God, Acts 24:16; when they are unlawful, they should be wholly disregarded, Ex. 1:17, 21.

To promote the real welfare of the civil communities to which they belong, is the duty of all, 1 Pet. 2:13-17. Those who wink at evil connected with them do not so, Job 15:12, 13; those who obey unjust laws do not do so, Micah 6:16; those who do not take means to reform them do not do so, Acts 18:5, 6. Moreover, those who would seek to overthrow their good institutions are malignant enemies, not merely of their country, but also of mankind, 2 Pet. 2:10. Only those who fear God are true friends of civil society, 1 Tim. 2:1, 2. Every one ought to promote the welfare of his neighbor, *cf.* Gen. 4:9. The wicked ought to be urged to break with sin and the ignorant ought to be instructed and urged to reform, Jas. 5:20. These various duties of the members of civil society are proper matter of solemn covenant engagement, Gen. 21:22-24.

Question 2.—Ought a covenant with God engage all to duties to societies other than families or civil communities?

Answer.—Besides families and civil communities, the performance of vowed duties is owed to the church of Christ, *cf.* 1 Tim. 3:15. These are enjoined by Christ Himself, Isa. 9:6, 7; they bind the conscience by a bond that men could neither have imposed nor relaxed, Rom. 14:4; Eph. 5:24. They are vowed in baptism, engaged in the Lord's supper, and ought to be the matter of solemn engagements of an explicit public nature, Rom. 6:3, 4; 1 Cor. 10:16, 21. These duties are:

First, to abide by all the ordinances of Divine grace; to keep the Sabbath, to celebrate the sacraments, to hear and preach the Gospel, to engage in the reading of the Word of God, and in praise and prayer, to make and keep secret and social vows, to associate with His people, and to attend to whatever observances of discipline He has made known, are indispensable services, Ps. 52:8, 9.

Second, to support the ordinances of religion where they are enjoyed, Prov. 3:9, 10. The LORD gave to ancient Israel the institutions of His house as a trust, Rom. 9:4. And to all His people He has given the promise of a heart to observe His statutes, for their own good, and the good of their children, Jer. 32:38, 39. It is the contributions of the people of God that these are continued, and blessing is promised to those who devote liberally of their substance to Him, Mal. 3:8-10.

Third, to maintain the rights and privileges of the church, as an inheritance which her members are bound by their relation to her to preserve and transmit, Isa. 8:16. This must be done against those who aid and abet corrupt systems of religion, often having once held the truth, the character of the true church of God, but have greatly relinquished it, consequently at once they tyrannically attempt to blind men, and to prevent them from

uniting with those who have the light among them, Luke 11:52. Against these systems, that the blinded who are attached to them may be delivered from their bondage, that the truly pious who are within them may be brought out of them, and that their invasions of the privileges of those who hold the truth may be limited, the rights of God's people behoove to be held forth by testimony and maintained, Rev. 18:4. The same must also be maintained against many civil rulers who assume for civil authority a supreme power over all causes, ecclesiastical and civil, for they practically attempt to deny to the church of Christ her privileges, Matt. 16:19.

Fourth, to unite the various churches of Christ, which we have reason to believe will be incorporated into one in the time of the Millennium, Zeph. 3:9. It is desirable that mutual communications regarding the truth be interchanged among those who desire, but are unable to see eye to eye, Isa. 52:8; and it is to be greatly wished, that all such, would strengthen each other's hands to give diffusion to their common views, Phil. 1:27. They cannot yet hold free communion, but various means of communication may be employed by them, without laying themselves open to the inroads of enemies, Phil. 4:2; 2 Thess. 3:14, 15.

Fifth, to enlarge the church, seeking to disseminate the truth as widely as possible through the voluntary agency of those who love it, Isa. 54:2-5. This is accomplished: 1.) By the liberal distribution of the Bible, wherein the way of salvation is made plain, John 5:39. 2.) Through missions: *first*, at home, for it is the duty common to both an individual as well as to the church of Christ, to nourish and cherish that body to which it is united, Eph. 5:28, 29. *Second*, to the heathen, endeavoring to bring them to receive and acknowledge Christ, and by special covenanting, to give themselves unto Him, taking hold upon Him for a covenant of the people, fulfilling the prophecy, Isa. 42:4. *Third*, to the Jews, whose restoration will be so advantageous to the Gentile churches when they again are grafted into their own olive tree, Rom. 11:15, 26, 27.