

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting Provided for in the Everlasting Covenant, Part 1)

“[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 difference ought we to perceive in the ordinance of covenanting under the law versus under grace?*

Answer.—The duty of covenanting is founded on the law of nature, Jon. 1:16; but it also stands among the arrangements of Divine mercy made from everlasting, Gen. 17:7. The promulgation of the law, enjoining it on man in innocence as a duty, was due to God’s necessary dominion over the creatures of His power, Job 22:2, 3. The revelation of it as a service obligatory on men in a state of sin, arose from His unmerited grace, Gal. 3:21. In one display, we contemplate the authority of the righteous moral Governor of the universe, Gal. 3:10; in the other, we see the claims of that law which cannot be abrogated, put forth along with manifestations of sovereign good-will to men, Rom. 3:21. Had God dealt with men according to their iniquities, that law which, in the first of men, they had violated, would have demanded their final punishment, Rom. 3:19, 20; and they, unable, because unwilling to give obedience, and unprovided with the means of deliverance, had fallen to ruin, Rom. 4:15. In order that His mercy might be manifested, the LORD, from the days of eternity, secured to sinners a fitness for duty, to stand as a substitute for that spiritual strength which they should lose by transgression, and acceptance through a great Mediator, which else had not been enjoyed, Rom. 8:3. On man, in a state of innocence, and also in a state of sin, the duty of covenanting was enjoined, Deut. 6:13. By reason of sin, strength given to him at first to perform it, was forever forfeited, Rom. 5:12. But to many, by a wondrous scheme of Divine love, it is given to enjoy, from engaging in it, benefits which cannot be lost, Gal. 3:13.

Question 2.—*Is the exercise of covenanting, in regard to sinners, provided for in the Covenant of Redemption?*

Answer.—Yes, for the Covenant of Redemption was made from the days of eternity, meaning it must be conceived to extend from eternity to eternity, Heb. 13:20. In adoration of the LORD, made known as a covenant God, this is confirmed, Ps. 90:2. So, the Mediator was set up from everlasting necessarily by entering into covenant, Prov. 8:23. Thus, the goings forth of Christ are described as from the days of eternity, Mic. 5:2. This everlasting covenant, wherein the concerns of sinners are taken in, is declared to be from eternity, Ps. 89:3, 28. Clearly, the Father’s Servant, the Mediator Christ, is covenanted from eternity and the conditions and promise of that covenant are recorded, Isa. 53:10-12. Moreover, the mutual satisfaction of the Father and Son with the conditions and fulfillment of the covenant, is also revealed, Isa. 42:21.

Question 3.—*How is the exercise of covenanting provided for in the Covenant of Redemption?*

Answer.—There are several things indicating that this exercise is provided for in the Covenant of Redemption:

First, in the Covenant of Redemption, Christ represented all of the elect, Isa. 42:1, 6. Even as the faithful descendants of Abraham were comprehended in the covenant which

God established with him, but in a far higher sense, the elect were included in that which was made with the Redeemer, Heb. 9:15. And as Adam was the representative of the human family, so Christ became the Head of all who should be saved, Rom. 5:15-19; 1 Cor. 15:47-49. It was on account of the people who were given to Him that the covenant was made, John 6:37. By an electing decree they were chosen in Him, Eph. 1:4. And the covenant was entered into with Him as their legal representative, Isa. 49:8. From eternity, therefore, by a legal, though not an actual union to Christ, they are a covenant people, Eph. 1:5. And even then, the blessings of the covenant were provided for them, Rom. 8:30. Until they are joined to Christ, the elect are not entitled to the blessings provided for them, Gal. 2:16. Nevertheless, they were contemplated in the covenant which gave them the privilege of being joined to the Redeemer, John 1:12. God, the Father, made with Christ, for each of His people, an everlasting covenant, Jer. 32:38, 40. Just as the deeds of our ancestors bind us to enter into covenant, Ps. 105:9, 10; this deed binds all of His people to covenant, Isa. 56:4, 6. The elect were all taken into covenant, Isa. 59:21; in their name, the Surety (Christ) engaged that they would enter into covenant, Jer. 31:33; on their behalf He promised an obedience which none other than Himself could give, Gal. 4:4-6; but He promises also the obedience that they should render—not necessary nor required for fulfilling the conditions of the covenant, but requisite, to show, to the glory of God, the certainty of the fulfilment of these, and the Father accepted this offer, Ps. 119:33-36. Covenanting, according to God's immutable law, is included in the obedience, Ps. 119:106.

Second, all the promises accepted in covenanting were made to the Surety in the Covenant of Redemption, 2 Cor. 1:20. In a promise including that of every benefit which those should enjoy through Him, a seed was presented to Him, Ps. 22:30. The promise of the Spirit, and all His glorious effects through the Word, was made not merely to the church but to Christ Himself, and therefore to Him in the everlasting covenant, Isa. 59:21. To Noah, to Abraham, to Israel under Moses, and to the church in succeeding ages, the LORD gave the promise that He would establish His covenant with His people, Gen. 6:18; 17:7; Lev. 26:9; Ezek. 16:62. And a promise equivalent to this He made when He engaged *to establish* His called and chosen, as a holy people unto Himself, Deut. 28:9; 29:13. But, a promise including each of these was given to Christ, as seen in a passage where the very same verb, (קָיַם, *qûm*) *to establish*, is grounded upon Himself and His everlasting covenant, Isa. 49:8. Elsewhere, a different Hebrew verb, (כִּיָּן, *kûn*), from a different origin, is used, meaning *to establish*, Ps. 89:3, 4. It is the promise of God that is laid hold on in covenanting, Isa. 55:3. He commands to draw near in covenanting, and He has prescribed the matter of vows which He will accept, but in order to give encouragement to perform the duty and fulfill its engagements, He has also made promises of good, 2 Sam. 23:5. To the sinner, these could not otherwise come than through Christ, John 15:4-6.

Third, this exercise of covenanting is on the ground of the righteousness of Christ, by which He fulfilled the obligations of the everlasting covenant contracted by Him, that His people covenant with God, Jer. 50:5. This may be seen in a careful reading of the Scripture in several places, Jer. 30:20-22 ("their nobles" in Hebrew is "their Noble One"). This Noble One mentioned is Christ, Who is also the Governor that should proceed out of the midst of Israel, Ps. 22:28. The description given of Him is not applicable to any earthly ruler of the house of Jacob, it corresponds to Him alone, Who is denominated as the Messiah, Ezek. 34:24; 37:24, 25. In fulfilling all righteousness, obeying the law of God,

and suffering and dying for His people, and in making intercession for them, He approached unto God, Ps. 24:3, 7. It was by faith in Him, that the saints, in early times, while they offered sacrifices by covenanting, acknowledged the LORD to be their God, Ps. 50:5. It was by faith in Him, that all to succeed them should in this manner avouch the LORD, Deut. 26:17, 18. He is the way unto the Father, John 14:6. By Him His people have access unto the grace wherein they stand, Eph. 2:18. While they profess faith in Him, it is by Him that they draw nigh in the full assurance of faith, Heb. 10:19-23.

Fourth, believers, as a people who would covenant and fulfil their obligations, were given the Mediator in the everlasting covenant, John 17:6. As a covenant people, the heathen were given to Him for an inheritance, *cf.* Ps. 2:8 *and* Deut. 32:9. So, the apostle's interpretation of the prophet confirms this, *cf.* Isa. 8:18 *with* Heb. 2:13. And that such were promised as a people who should discharge the duty of covenanting, and the other engagements of the covenant appear, Jer. 3:19. He received also the promise—implying, that a people in serving Him should habitually take hold on Him in covenanting, Ps. 22:30. These passages intimate that one of the reasons for which they were given to Him, was that they should obey God in taking hold of His covenant, Heb. 6:17.

Finally, the elect were chosen in Christ that, in union to Him, they might perform this duty, including all that is implied in holiness, Eph. 1:4. It is in that spiritual union to Him, which was secured by their election and the gift of them in the everlasting covenant, that they discharge every duty, Jer. 31:3. Thus, it was because of the sovereign love of God that His church was chosen, and united to Christ in the character of His covenanted spouse, Eph. 5:31, 32. In consequence of that love, which is manifested even by the infliction of chastisement, being branches of Him—the true vine—they are purged that they may bring forth more abundantly those fruits of righteousness, among which stands the act of taking hold on God's covenant, John 15:5. These fruits include not merely the obedience of the life, but the homage of the heart expressed by the lip, for by the lip, fruit is brought forth when God's name is called upon in vowing and swearing to Him, Heb. 13:15 (“giving thanks,” ὁμολογέω; *homologēo*; the verbal expression of oneness of mind). The elect are chosen to salvation through sanctification and belief of the truth, and consequently to covenanting, as well as every other act in which faith is exercised, 2 Thess. 2:13. At the same moment that Divine power is put forth in order to conversion, both union to Christ, and the faith which recognizes that union, are at once vouchsafed, 1 Cor. 12:12, 13. Therefore, the faith of the believer is exercised by him resting on Christ as the one foundation laid in Zion, 1 Pet. 2:6-10; and reposing on Him, he habitually takes hold on the covenant of God, instead of a refuge of lies—the covenant with death and hell—which shall be swept away, Isa. 28:15-18. It is the glory of God that Christ is confessed, Phil. 2:11. It is in union to Christ as the true foundation that this is done, Col. 2:6, 7. The glory of God as a strength is spoken of as *being founded* upon the confession, or covenanting, of His people, Ps. 8:2 (“ordained strength,” literally “laid a foundation of strength,” [יָסַד; *yāsad*]); Matt. 21:16. Where there is Divine power and majesty, there is glory, Ps. 96:6 (“beauty,” or “glory”). Resting on the one foundation, as a temple to the glory of God, the church engaging in the act of confessing Him in covenanting, and otherwise keeping His covenant, will therefore realize the promise, Isa. 46:13.