

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Seasons of Covenanting)

“[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 general grounds for the practice of covenanting at any given time?*

Answer.—The duty is never unsuitable, *cf.* 1 Kings 8:56-61. Men have frequently, improperly esteemed the exercise as one that should be had recourse to, only on some great emergency, *cf.* Ps. 66:13, 14. But as it is sinful to defer religious exercises till affliction, presenting the prospect of death, constrain to attempt them, so it is wrong to imagine, that the pressure of calamity principally should constrain to make solemn vows, *cf.* Judg. 11:30, 35, 36. The exercise of personal covenanting should be practiced habitually, *cf.* Ps. 61:5, 8. It is not enough that the heart be once given to God; when this has really been done it is a great attainment; but it must again and again be surrendered in renewed acts of self-dedication, in order to the maintenance of any thing like fidelity and steadfastness in His service, *cf.* Prov. 23:26; 2 Cor. 8:5. A daily recognition of our relationship to Christ, is full of comfort and encouragement, and is at the same time invaluable as a means of sanctification, *cf.* Deut. 6:5. It is a great and precious privilege to be able, in all difficulties and dangers, to speak of the great Jehovah in the language of Paul, Acts 27:23. It is a powerful argument, in applying for deliverance from evil of whatever kind, that is employed by the Psalmist, Ps. 119:94. And though the exercises of social covenanting are not practicable so frequently as those of that which is personal, there is no reason why they, any more than any other, should be reckoned as incumbent only on occasions of an extraordinary nature, *cf.* Ps. 22:25.

Question 2.—*What are the special grounds for the practice of covenanting at any given time?*

Answer.—Specials seasons do give peculiar calls to the duty in all its variety:

First, in times of hazard and distress, by displaying in relief, the vanity of all the aids that mere creatures could afford, and finding men looking around for comfort and support, invite, with a power peculiar to themselves, to look to Him who is a present help to His people in every time of need, and cordially, by covenanting, to respond to the Divine invitation given in Scripture, Ps. 50:15. Thus, when the church is exposed to danger from the combined assaults of her enemies, *cf.* Rev. 12:12. So, after the return of the captives from Babylon, Sanballat, Geshem, the Arabian, and Tobiah, the Ammonite, chief men in the great neighboring nations, and types of their kingdoms, confederated together for the ruin of the church, *cf.* Ezra 4:13. The captive exiles who had returned, were few, poor, and their farms desolate, *cf.* Neh. 5:8. They confess their sins, as we should do, without delay, and renew the covenants of their fathers, Neh. 9:36-38.

Our own times are fraught with danger to the church, *cf.* Rev. 11:3-7; 12:12-17. The complexion, animating spirit, and administration of every civil government in the world is adverse to the government of Messiah, the Prince of the kings of the earth, *cf.* Rev. 16:14. All the organized systems of worship, as systems which are confederated with these bad thrones, give their power to the beast, in the war which the dragon wages with the Lamb,

cf. Rev. 17:12-14. Messiah calls on all his followers to *unite* in solemn covenanting for the city of our God, *cf.* Jer. 4:2; Isa. 65:16.

Second, when religion is low, and error and vice and ungodliness prevail, the hosts of darkness are successful; but their clamor is unfit to drown the cry, so fitted to inspire with holy zeal, then urging to special devotedness to the LORD's cause, Ex. 32:26. For seven years, in the reign of Athaliah, an impious and cruel queen, the whole kingdom of Judah became debased by idolatry and gross immorality, except Jehoiada the priest, and a few others, *cf.* 2 Chron. 23:1. In order to effect a reformation, the pious priest brought chosen officers into the temple of the Lord, "and made a covenant with them," 2 Kings 11:4. At the coronation of Josiah by the reformers, they renewed their covenant, 2 Kings 11:17. All this was done to secure the blessing of Christ on His own ordinance, by increasing their faith, by promoting mutual confidence, and harmonious co-operation in the hallowed work of reforming the church and nation, *cf.* 2 Chron. 34:30, 31. The temple of the Lord was repaired, the administration of the nation restored in purity, and so a whole generation of peace and prosperity in the church and nation, and hundreds of thousands of souls prepared for heavenly mansions, *cf.* 2 Kings 12:4-15. Such are blessed fruits of covenanting, *cf.* 2 Chron. 15:14, 15; Ps. 103:17, 18. Christ has always smiled most propitiously on this ordinance, *cf.* 2 Chron. 29:10.

Third, when any important public work is to be performed, *cf.* Josh. 24:25. Preparatory to the organization of church and commonwealth, the people entered into a public vow and covenant at Horeb, Ex. 24:3, 7, 8. This most solemn transaction did not supersede the Abrahamic covenant, as some appear to have thought in Galatia, Gal. 3:15, 17. The transaction at Horeb was a renovation and development of the covenant made with Abraham, *cf.* Deut. 5:2, 3; Ps. 105:8-10. It prepared them for receiving the blessings, and performing the personal and social part of the covenant of their fathers, *cf.* Deut. 29:10-15.

The kingdoms of this world are in the agonies of their death-struggle, and must soon die, *cf.* Dan. 7:23-26. The spasmodic and convulsive throes amongst the European republics demonstrate that a crisis of great magnitude is near at hand, *cf.* Dan. 2:40-45. The saints of the Most High will soon take the kingdom, *cf.* Dan. 7:17, 18, 22, 27. The church is about to enter on the performance of duties like those of Israel in the wilderness, *cf.* Acts 7:45-47; Rom. 11:15; Rev. 20:4. The commonwealth must be organized on Christian principles and mutual relations of church and state, and all the rights of man secured on a scriptural covenanted basis, as at Horeb, *cf.* Rev. 11:15.

Fourth, in times of reviving, there are transmitted by every gale from heaven, the words of the Redeemer, inviting His spouse—His church, individually and socially to the holy duty of acknowledging Him as her Lord, Song 2:10. So, in the reign of Asa, when he was awakened to the words of the prophet, and he intended to cleanse the land of idols, he gathered the people to covenant, *cf.* 2 Chron. 15:8-12. Likewise, during the revival under king Josiah, when that awakening instilled in the people a renewed regard for the Word of God, they engaged in social covenanting, *cf.* 2 Kings 23:1-3.

Fifth, when friends of truth unite for its maintenance, either in an incorporate or other capacity, they are called to follow the LORD, the "Leader," *cf.* Isa. 55:4. It is said of the wicked, *against Thy covenant they shall covenant*, Ps. 83:5. What ought to be the conduct unitedly of those, who individually are interested in the LORD's covenant? *cf.* Isa. 56:6. Are they not urged, to declare most explicitly by formally taking hold upon it, that they have come up to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty? *cf.* Ps. 89:18-21. Thus, when the church needs means to secure what she has gained, like

Israel after seventeen years in Canaan, and shortly before the death of Joshua, the church and nation renewed their covenant in Shechem, Josh. 24:25.

The witnessing church has gained much territory, and made great progress “in binding up the testimony, and sealing the law,” Isa. 8:16. To this end, we must enter into covenant “to strengthen the stakes,” Isa. 54:2.

Question 3.—*What are some things that can be predicated of the exercise of covenanting?*

Answer.—*First*, this exercise is advantageous: 1.) Preparation for it leads to accurate apprehensions of duty, *cf.* Job 11:13-15. 2.) It tends to cherish a devout solemnity of mind, *cf.* 1 Chron. 16:15. 3.) It leads to the comforts of habitual holy communion with God, *cf.* 1 Cor. 1:9. 4.) It impresses with a sense of increased obligation, that furnishes an ardor of mind, powerfully impelling to duty, *cf.* Ps. 103:18. 5.) It tends to unite many in affection, and sentiment, and zeal for truth, *cf.* 2 Chron. 30:12. 6.) It presents instruction most solemnly to the young and rising race, leading them to inquire concerning it, *cf.* Ex. 12:26. 7.) It is calculated to arrest for good the attention of society at large, *cf.* Deut. 29:10-12. 8.) And it provides benefits of the most valuable and extensive, for generations unborn, *cf.* Deut. 29:14, 15; Ps. 78:1-8.

Second, it is necessary: 1.) It forms a part of the system of means devised by Jehovah for carrying forward His work; and it must be observed, *cf.* Deut. 10:20. His work, by this and other means, will be completed, *cf.* Ps. 132:12. 2.) Though the evils that have occurred in the world have been permitted, yet some are chargeable with blame for committing them, and others are culpable for not having used various means, of which covenanting is one, in order that they might have been prevented, *cf.* Ps. 78:10. Though the Romish apostasy was permitted, yet who can tell how far the church of God was culpable in not using extensively enough for its prevention, covenanting—one means directly adapted to that purpose? *cf.* Jer. 11:10. And who can tell what effect the performance of the duty will have in leading to the good store for the church, even on earth, and to the prevention of evil which, if allowed, would arise? *cf.* Jer. 50:5; Isa. 45:23.