

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Introduction and Nature 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 is the importance of covenanting?*

Answer.—The importance of covenanting appears to be written on the heart of man universally from the earliest days of mankind, Gen. 14:22; 15:18. In the annals of nature, these impulses are darkened by the effects of man’s fall into an estate of sin, Rom. 1:21, 31; yet, in Scripture, the character of covenanting is drawn such that, like all of God’s judgments contained therein, through meditating upon it, the ignorant will be brought to true knowledge and the wise increased in wisdom, Ps. 25:14.

In Scripture, the nature and manner of performing this duty of covenanting are defined, Num. 30:2-14; its obligation by engaging in it are exhibited, Ps. 76:11; provision is made for its continuance, Ps. 50:14; and its recommendation is made to the advantage of the Gospel church, Isa. 19:18-25. Whereas the duties of prayer and praise are acknowledged to be part of religion even by the heathen, Acts 17:23; the Bible also gives place to the exercise of covenanting, Lev. 27:2.

Question 2.—*What is the nature of covenanting?*

Answer.—A covenant is a mutual voluntary compact between two parties on given terms or conditions, Gen. 17:1, 2. Such covenants may be made between parties of differing relative circumstances, so that covenant relations may be established not merely between nation and nation, or man and man, but also between master and servant and rulers and their subjects, Deut. 15:17; 2 Kings 11:17.

Thus, there is described an engagement, a covenant, between God and Adam (as the representative of the human race), which we call the Covenant of Works, Hos. 6:7; Rom. 5:12. There is a revelation of a Covenant of Redemption, from eternity, between the Father and the Son, for the salvation of the elect, Isa. 42:6. This Covenant is made known and established with men appearing as a Covenant of Grace, Gal. 3:17, 18. It is under this Covenant of Grace that men are encouraged to enter into covenant with God by taking hold of this covenant, Isa. 56:4.

The conditions of a covenant are the mutual things promised in the covenant by the parties to one another, whether mutual services, as among men, Gen. 21:27; obedience and unmerited good through the bestowal of God’s favor, as in man’s state of innocence, Gen. 2:16; obedience and sufferings, together with a reward for those represented in the Covenant of Redemption, John 6:38, 39; or, the free grace, as in the Covenant of Grace, 2 Cor. 1:20.

This covenant relation is distinguished from the law by expressions not applicable to the latter, so that men are represented as *joining* themselves to the LORD and *entering into* an everlasting covenant, but such is not so spoken of the law, Jer. 50:5. So, too, the LORD promises to make a covenant with His chosen ones but He never promises to make a law with any, Gen. 17:7. This relation, with God, as a covenant, has parties both by the LORD and by His people in Christ, it is a covenant mutually entered into, Zech. 13:9.

This covenant relation with God has conditions: on the part of the LORD, there are promises of good for believers made in the Covenant of Redemption and revealed in the Covenant of Grace, Isa. 55:3. On the part of the believer, though his faith and imperfect obedience are necessary, these are not the condition but it is founded in the perfect righteousness of Christ as fulfilled on behalf of His elect children, Isa. 45:24. This is God's covenant revealed as a Covenant of Grace and established with Noah, Gen. 6:18; which He made with Abraham, Gen. 15:18; which He swore unto Isaac, Gen. 26:3; and which He confirmed unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, Ps. 105:10. This is that same covenant which was confirmed of God in Christ, of which Jesus is the Mediator, and has been commanded forever, Gal. 3:17; Heb. 9:15; Ps. 111:9.

Covenanting is the exercise of either entering, as an individual or in a social capacity, solemnly and formally into the Covenant of Grace, or of renewing it, Acts 11:23. Therefore, by covenanting, men do make a covenant with God, Deut. 29:12; moreover, when men renovate a covenant, it is not less a covenant than the original bond, Neh. 10:29. In covenanting, the covenanters give acquiescence to the conditions of the Covenant of Grace, which is an essential of a covenant, Ex. 19:8; thus, every lawful engagement entered into by solemnly covenanting with God possesses the character of a covenant, 2 Chron. 15:12-15.

Question 3.—*What is the character of covenanting or engagement in covenant?*

Answer.—Solemn covenanting is not distinct from the Covenant of Redemption, nor from the Covenant of Grace, it is dependent on that covenant as made with the Mediator, and consistent with it as established with men, 1 Kings 8:9, 21, 23. In all three cases, the God of grace is one of the contracting parties, 2 Kings 13:23. In the Covenant of Redemption, the Redeemer Himself, as the surety of the elect, is the other party, Ps. 89:3. In the Covenant of Grace, the people united to Christ, and drawing near to God through Him, are the other party, Judg. 2:1. In the case of personal or social covenanting, the party, whether individual or jointly, approaches in dependence on the grace of Christ, 1 Sam. 23:18.

In all three cases, the righteousness of Christ is the sole ground on which a title to the promise can rest, Isa. 42:6. In all, obedience to the law is required: 1.) In the Covenant of Redemption, Christ gave that perfect obedience, Phil. 2:8; John 17:5, 6. 2.) In the Covenant of Grace, though the discharge of this obedience is not any ground of merit before God, it forms a testimony to the perfection of His laws, Rom. 7:22-25. 3.) Since all duty may be frequently engaged to, and special duties in given circumstances, as they present themselves, they may be made the subject of a solemn covenant promise to God, 2 Kings 23:3.

It is an essential element in covenanting that none may enter into the covenant of God at any time except by faith, 2 Chron. 29:10. However, an individual may wait upon this ordinance, like all of the ordinances of God, not being in covenant but through a bare formalism, 2 Chron. 34:32. One may be convinced of sin without being converted and so devoid of that necessary faith, Heb. 11:6. Yet, a man may be urged forward to an exercise which, if performed in the proper spirit, would be accepted, Luke 18:1. Nevertheless, it is the people of God, those who possess saving faith, who actually enter into covenant, Ps. 50:16.