

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenant Duties, 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.—*How do we know that every duty, in suitable circumstances, ought to be engaged to in the exercise of covenanting?*

Answer.—The law and the covenant of God are co-extensive, Ex. 31:18; so, what is enjoined in one is confirmed in the other, and the proposals of that covenant include its promises and its duties, Deut. 4:13. The former are made and fulfilled by its glorious Originator, 2 Cor. 1:20; and the latter are enjoined and obligatory on man, Mic. 6:8. The duties of that covenant are God’s law, Deut. 10:2-4; and the demands of the law are all made in the revelation of the covenant, Ezek. 36:27. It was unlawful for the Israelites to make a covenant, either with the gods of the heathen, or for the purpose of rendering them any service, Ex. 23:32. In like manner, it is still unlawful for any one to make a covenant either with or for what is evil, in such a manner as to give it countenance or support, 2 Cor. 6:15.

Of the two Greek words most often employed to denote a covenant, *sunthēkē* and *diathēkē* (συνθήκη and διαθήκη), the former denotes a covenant wherein parties are in some respect on a level whereas the latter is used where the parties are in some respects in the relations of superiors and inferiors; the latter is the principal term used in the LXX to translate *bērit* (בְּרִית), *cf.* Job 41:4 (40:28 in Hebrew text). There is already herein an expression of the fact that the covenant of God does not have the character of a contract between two parties, but rather that of a one-sided grant and this corresponds with the covenant-idea in the Old Testament, in which *bērit*, even in human relations, sometimes refers to a one-party guarantee which a more favored person gives a less favored one, *cf.* Josh. 9:6, 15.

The book of the covenant of God, was the book of the law and, therefore, the curses of the covenant were written in the book of the law, Deut. 29:21. In that book, too, the promises of the covenant were contained, so the statutes and covenant of God are conjoined and both are commanded—the former that they might be obeyed, the latter that it might be taken hold upon, that the duties contained in the statutes might be observed, 1 Kings 11:11. Moreover, that which is made known as the everlasting covenant, is given as a law, Ps. 105:8-10.

Covenanting, whether personal or social, ought to embrace present and permanent duty, 2 Pet. 1:12. The Ten Commandments are of perpetual obligation on all, and so is every moral precept included in them, including every positive statute which is applicable to this last dispensation, Jas. 2:10, 11. But, the words of the Covenant of Grace were written on the tables of the covenant, Ex. 34:28. Hence, every divine statute, obligatory on men, being in accordance with the Decalogue, or forming part of it, every duty that can be performed, whether at present or afterwards, is incumbent, and ought to be engaged to as a covenant duty, Lev. 26:15. Certain observances, not merely because they were signs of the covenant of God, but were also duties of it, were denominated a covenant, such as circumcision and the seventh-day sabbath, Gen. 17:13; Ex. 31:13. And if

circumcision and the seventh-day sabbath were thus denominated and commanded for specified periods as covenant duties, ought not all services decreed by divine authority be performed, not merely as enjoined in the divine law, but also to be preceded by solemn covenant engagement to discharge them aright? Deut. 4:23. And remembering that the saints vow and endeavor constantly to keep all these commands, the Psalmist vowed, Ps. 119:44. Thus, the people of God, as a nation of kings and priests, chosen, and called, and consecrated to His service, have the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, Num. 25:13.

Question 2.—*Why ought a covenant with God engage all to duties to each one's self?*

Answer.—Because the divine law inculcates upon men, not selfishness, but love to themselves, so that the evils forbidden therein should not be perpetrated on others or one's self, Matt. 22:39. Therefore, the apostle shows at once both the duty of all and the practice of those who fear God, Eph. 5:29. Those who do not make use of all the means which God has appointed for promoting true happiness of all individually, do not love themselves, Lev. 19:18. So, being aware of this, the believer, entering into a covenant engagement with God, vows to perform to himself the duties which correspond to his condition, beginning with the cultivation of personal religion, Ps. 18:3. Self-examination ought to be covenanted for that duty is also to be exhorted, Lam. 3:40. Religious meditation should be vowed, upon both the works and precepts of the LORD, Ps. 77:12; 119:15, 16. Prayer should be covenanted, Ps. 55:16, 17. So should godly fear be vowed, Ps. 119:62, 63; together with the glad offering of praise, Ps. 145:1, 2. In other words, the soul which clings to the divine covenant will bind itself to the whole worship of God, Ps. 5:7; 138:1, 2.

Sobriety and temperance, which are commanded in Scripture, are maintained when this world is used so as not to be abused, 1 Cor. 7:31. Along with other excellencies of character, they are inculcated in the command to be holy, 1 Pet. 1:16. The force of habit alone is insufficient to keep believers from sin, divine grace alone can enable to adhere to these excellencies in an acceptable manner, Ps. 19:13. In order to be observed, they must be vowed, so that the sin that does so easily beset being laid aside and the purity of heart and life that adorns a Christian might be assumed, Rom. 6:12, 13.

The cultivation of various powers of the soul, when these are directed to good objects, and are wisely employed, it is the duty of men to improve, Prov. 4:23. The heart, in the Scriptures, means, in addition to the bodily organ, the soul, the seat of affections, the understanding, the seat of the will and, therefore, it has attributed to it the functions of an active, voluntary intelligence together with the faculty of conscience, which must be surrendered in full vigor to God, Prov. 23:26. It is obeyed when these intellectual and moral faculties are engaged by vow in dutiful operation making noble applications in active strength, Ps. 18:1. It is honored when that purity of heart, which cannot be attained to without direction of the exercises of God, is aspired at in the act of drawing nigh unto Him in covenanting, Jas. 4:8.

The proper application of every capacity, each given that it might be employed, demands the voluntary use of it for the end intended, 2 Cor. 8:5. By setting every attainment, whether natural or acquired, apart to His service, all are called to glorify God with their bodies and spirits, which are His, 1 Cor. 6:20. Without making such a resolution to serve Him by the legitimate use of every capacity, there cannot fail to be incurred the charge preferred against some who, either by neglecting their duty of vowing to God, or by disregarding their solemn obligations, voluntarily accepted, have not had their hearts

conformed, Ps. 78:37. The apostle, when he exhorts, does not mean less than that there should not merely be an acknowledgement of incumbent duties to serve God, but, by exercise of covenanting, a strengthening of engagement to duties specified, 1 Cor. 15:58. Moreover, the covenant engagements of those faithful servants who, having improved the talents committed to them by their Lord, were commended of Him, are a pattern for all, for their obedience, regarding talents, without engagement to have Him reign over them would have been deficient, Luke 19:12-27.

Finally, all such vows are widely different from those restraints which have no higher recommendation than human authority, such as Popish monastic vows of perpetual single life, *etc.*, *cf.* Matt. 19:11, 12. The latter are countenanced by no class of vows lawfully made, either in the Old Testament or in a later period, *cf.* Acts 23:12, 14.