

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting According to the Purposes of God, 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 belongs to the elect people of God and confirms their status as a people in covenant?*

Answer.—The people of God were elected to privileges that can be enjoyed only by those in covenant with Him, Deut. 4:13. Theirs is the heavenly calling to which they were elected to enjoy, Rom. 9:11. All saints being called, and chosen, and faithful, Abraham had been a partaker of this calling when God delivered to him the command to leave his native land, which the patriarch obeyed, Gen. 12:1-4. That effectual call led him to obey the special mandate to go forth to Canaan, and to believe the precious promise that had been made to him, Heb. 11:8, 9. When the covenant of God was established with him by that call, he laid hold upon it, testifying to his acquiescence in it, by believing in the LORD, by sacrificing unto Him, and by receiving circumcision as a covenant sign, *cf.* Gen. 17:24, 25 *with* Rom. 4:11. And that, as the promise of that covenant was to the Jews who were called, so its seasonable duties, and consequently the exercise of engaging to it, were incumbent upon them, appears from the record of the specially momentous day of Pentecost, *cf.* Acts 2:1 *with* Lev. 23:15, 16. Manifestly keeping in view the covenant, by inculcating on the people a regard to baptism—its sign, Acts 2:38, 39. Not merely to the Jews was its precious promise of the “seed,” Christ, but to the Gentiles also, Gal. 3:16. And faith in Him, and the duty of keeping and of entering into covenant with Him, under the latter dispensation, are obligatory on all, Gal. 3:8, 9. And the Gospel is preached, that men receiving the external call may be called effectually, and thus brought to receive the promise, and fulfil the duties required, Acts 13:46-48. Like the Israelites, who, after His manifestation in the flesh, believed in Jesus, all the people of God feel and acknowledge their covenant obligations, that they should show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, 1 Pet. 2:9, 10. To the condition of a people keeping covenant, the seed of Jacob yet to be reclaimed, as chosen of God will be called, Rom. 11:25-29. And all whom He had before prepared unto glory, even those whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles, as a people in covenant acting faith on Christ will lay hold on the covenant promise, Heb. 9:15.

To the elect people of God belongs the blessing of justification, Rom. 8:30. Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness, Gen. 15:6. It was when, in the exercise of covenanting, he accepted of the promise of God, that he was thus blessed, Rom. 4:20-22. All who believe are the children of Abraham, and, being in covenant, are, by being justified, blessed with him, Rom. 4:23-25. It is said that of all the seed that is justified in the LORD, they are those concerning whom the LORD hath sworn they shall take hold of His covenant, Isa. 45:23-25. The Lord Jesus, exalted a Prince and a Saviour, is made of God unto His people, righteousness, Acts 5:31. Being justified by faith, they have the covenant blessing of peace with God, through Christ, Rom. 5:1. And to the glory of the Redeemer, and to the manifestation of the solemn covenant relations to God in which they stand, making mention of His righteousness, they will vow and swear to Him,

Rom. 3:22. Under the auspicious reign of Messiah, seated at God's right hand, the people of Israel, restored to their own land, will do so, Jer. 23:6-8. And this duty the Gentiles nations also shall perform, Jer. 4:2.

The Lord hath chosen His people to the adoption of sons, Eph. 1:5. In that character they individually, and also in a social capacity, vow to the LORD, and keep His covenant, Isa. 56:6. To manifest that that relation recognizes the necessity of self-dedication unto Him, He says to each one called to His service, to give one's heart, or covenant, Prov. 23:26. That Israel might be led into the wilderness, and thence to Canaan, not merely to give continual obedience to His law, but at certain seasons, as a people, to enter into solemn covenant with God, Pharaoh had addressed to him a message to this effect, Ex. 4:22, 23. In terms which describe the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Surety of sinners, the covenant of royalty which God made with David is also commemorated, Ps. 89:3, 20-28. In that covenant Solomon was interested, and, standing in such a relation, was the object of the promise, 2 Sam. 7:14. Jacob, described as the LORD's servant, and Israel as His elect, and who are represented as vowing and swearing to the LORD, are acknowledged as His sons, Isa. 45:4, 23-25, 11. Israel, by falling into idolatry, manifestly disregarding the solemn covenant obligations that had descended upon them, were reminded of their sin, by a representation of that filial relation to God in which their fathers stood, but to which many, notwithstanding their professions through unbelief, never attained, Hos. 11:1, 2. In the character of sons, will Israel be reclaimed from their apostasy, and voluntarily enter into solemn engagements with God as His covenant people, Jer. 31:9, 31-37. In the character of children, too, they shall enjoy the benefits of God's covenant, Jer. 3:18, 19; and, like them, all the chosen of God will hear His gracious invitation to return, and with them cheerfully coming under the obligation to serve Him, they will confess He is their God, Jer. 3:22. So, both Jews and Gentiles are interested in the apostle's declaration to the Galatians, Gal. 3:26, 29.

The elect people of God are a sanctified people, 2 Thess. 2:13. The people entered into a covenant with the LORD at Sinai, but that they might be prepared for acceding to it, and for the accompanying solemnities, they, as a holy people, required to make progress in sanctification, were previously to be sanctified, Ex. 19:10. In order to wait upon God, the people of Israel were commanded to sanctify themselves, Lev. 20:7. The place of His gracious presence, where His people, besides engaging in other exercises, swore in covenanting with Him, was His sanctuary, Ps. 50:5. His covenant with His people, as that with Abraham, is a holy covenant, Luke 1:72. That His people may enter into covenant renewedly, the LORD Himself will sanctify them, Lev. 20:8. His Sabbath, the sign of His covenant, He gave them, that they might know this, Ex. 31:13. Many swore by those that were no gods, but to His own people as swearing by His name He promises blessings to His people, Zeph. 1:7 (*bid—sanctified*). By the Holy Ghost they are sanctified, that they may dedicate themselves to God, and thereafter serve Him, Rom. 15:15, 16. This offering up or oblation of the Gentiles might be acceptable, was that urged elsewhere by Paul, Rom. 12:1. And by the blood of the everlasting covenant are such set apart to this, Heb. 13:12, 15, 16.

To the elect belong the benefits of redemption that accompany and flow from acceptance with God:

First, assurance of God's love, which though not all believers attain to it, it is attainable, 1 John 5:10. It is vouchsafed as a provision of the everlasting covenant, Ps. 25:14. Those who enjoy it know that to it they were elected, 1 Thess. 1:4.

Second, peace of conscience, because it is according to the purpose of God that faith is exercised, Phil. 1:29; and by that faith, through which justification, a fruit of the Divine counsels, is bestowed, and which is in exercise in covenanting, peace with God is enjoyed, Rom. 5:1. On the Israel of God, who are by covenant engaged to His service, the peace of God is invoked, Gal. 6:15, 16. God, in covenant, is the God of peace, Eph. 2:14.

Third, joy in the Holy Ghost, Rom. 14:17; for everyone that sweareth truly by Him shall rejoice in God, and shall glory, Ps. 63:11. Joy in God is essential to the exercise properly conducted therefore the saints testify from their own experience to the perfect correspondence to their feelings of these words, dictated by His own Spirit, Isa. 61:8-10. Supplication may be made for joy in vowing and swearing by His name, Ps. 86:4. The Church of God, yea, many nations, are commanded to rejoice, performing this service, Zech. 2:10, 11. On a solemn occasion, all Judah rejoiced at the oath which they had sworn, 2 Chron. 15:15. Promises are made, that, engaging in this exercise, many will rejoice; so, those who shall take hold on the covenant of God will be joyful in His house of prayer, Isa. 56:6, 7.

Fourth, increase of grace, because the covenant people are a remnant according to the election of grace, Rom. 11:5. Being heirs of the grace of life, they were, in God's purposes, according to His covenant, set apart to the enjoyment of grace progressively, 1 Pet. 3:7. They are planted in the house of God, and grow up and flourish in His courts, and there they still bring forth fruit in old age, Ps. 92:13, 14. To them that fear the name of the LORD, and accordingly avouch Him to be their God, is made that promise of Malachi, Mal. 4:2. That promise, as well as every other, is due to His immutable counsel, Heb. 6:17. To grow in grace is a command given which must be co-ordinate with the increase in the knowledge of Christ, which is attained by cleaving to His covenant, 2 Pet. 3:18. And, Jesus Himself teaches, that fitness to do so was provided according to His purpose, John 15:16.

Fifth, perseverance in grace, because God's covenant with His people shall not be broken, Judg. 2:1; Ps. 94:14. He will give grace to cleave to it continually, Jer. 32:40. Believers were given to Christ, and therefore they cannot be lost, John 10:28, 29. Trusting in Him, therefore, His people rejoice in this promise, 2 Tim. 2:19.

Sixth, eternal life, which is a consummation indissolubly connected with the purpose of God, and the believer's exercise of adhering to the covenant, Isa. 41:9. On the promise of eternal life the heirs of it lay hold in covenanting, for to this they were chosen, Rev. 17:14. They cleave to the covenant as an everlasting covenant, well ordered in all things and sure, for to this final salvation they were chosen, Rom. 8:30.