

## ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting Adapted to the Moral Constitution of Man, Part 1)

“[P]ublic, social covenanting, is an ordinance of God, obligatory on churches and nations under the New Testament.”—Fourth Term of Communion.

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Question 1.—*Why is covenanting adapted to the moral constitution of the creature?*

*Answer.*—The law of God originates in His nature, Jas. 4:12; but the attributes of His creatures are due to His sovereignty, 1 Cor. 4:7. The former is, accordingly, to be viewed as necessarily obligatory on the moral subjects of His government, and the latter—which are all consistent with the holiness of the Divine nature, are to be considered as called into exercise according to His appointment, Isa. 33:22. Hence, also, the law of God is independent of His creatures, though made known on their account, Ps. 147:19; but the operation of their attributes behoove to be regulated according to that law, Deut. 33:2. The principles of eternal holiness, embodied in the law, necessarily existed because of the eternity and infinite glory of God, Ps. 99:9; but would not have been made the basis of a law had creatures not been formed, Lev. 19:2. The constitution of the creatures who should be called to give obedience, was wholly due to the will of God, but in perfect harmony with the spirit of his commands, *cf.* Eph. 2:10. Moral creatures having been formed, the law of God speaks one language to all of them, and they, possessed of different characteristic attributes, alike recognize its appeals, Ps. 148. Angels have a constitution which distinguishes them from man, yet with him they apprehend the authority of the one moral law, Ps. 8:4, 5. Over a range, therefore, of infinite extent, the principles of eternal rectitude are maintained, Ps. 19:7. Man, in innocence, recognized them, Gen. 2:15. Man, redeemed, cleaves to them according to his attainments in grace, John 15:10. Angels, possessed of a nature different from that of man, acknowledge their obligation upon them, Acts 7:53. And God Himself, distant from His highest moral offspring by a difference that is infinite, exhibits them as a manifestation of His holiness, and the principles according to which He acts towards His creatures, Isa. 45:23. Much, therefore, in common belongs to the constitution of the moral natures of angels and men, and necessarily proceeds from and accords with the nature of God, Rev. 4:8-11. His law, we have seen, inculcates the duty of covenanting, Rom. 14:11. From what has been said, we would, therefore, conclude that the constitution of man was fitted to that exercise, Deut. 6:13.

Question 2.—*How is covenanting adapted to the moral constitution of man in innocence?*

*Answer.*—*First*, the Scripture account of that constitution appears in the manner in which he is represented in his creation, Gen. 1:27; Eccl. 7:29. These declarations of Scripture imply that man was created in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and accordingly, in conformity with the will of God, as to his intellect, his affections, his conscience, and will, Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24. When brought into existence, his intellectual and moral powers were full grown, and his knowledge was suited to the state of a creature fitted to hold communion with God, Gen. 5:1. His intellect was fitted completely to survey, according to its capacity, the whole scene of natural and moral existence presented before it, from the lowest stage of dependent being to what it was competent to him to know of God, Deut. 29:29. His affections, in a flame alike pure and ardent, glowed at the prospect

of moral excellence which appeared in the works of God, and above all, in Himself, Zech. 9:17; Phil. 4:8. His conscience, tender as the perfection of a delicate spiritual organization worthy the creative energy of a Being of spotless infinite holiness, was in perfect sympathy with the awards of that perfection of judgment which, from eternity to eternity, is unchanged, Rev. 16:7. And his will, the mighty gift, emblem of the volition of the Giver, approved what He decreed, Ps. 107:31. With such capacities, accompanied with corresponding knowledge of the external world and the internal man, and with a perfect acquaintance with the nature and demands of God's law, the favored creature man could not but acquiesce in it, Gen. 2:8. To the claims of its glorious Author, put forth by it, he was led by the most sure, and yet most gentle and delightful constraints, to give his acquiescence, Gen. 2:15. What it demanded as duty to God, and duty to man, as if bound, yet free, he joyously proffered and endeavored to give, Ps. 128:2. What it forbade, he, in the same spirit, desired not to attain to, but resolved to reject, *cf.* Prov. 4:10-15. That law required, in its first command, the avouchment of God as a God in covenant, Ex. 20:3; in its second, it demanded the same, in anticipation of whatever evil—such as the inroads of Satan, might tempt to lead from Him, Ex. 20:4; in its third, it claimed the fulfilment of the duty of solemn appeal to the I AM by oath, Ex. 20:7; in its ninth, it required the speaking of truth to man, and consequently, the public avouchment of God as a God in covenant before others, Ex. 20:16; and in entering into covenant with him, the favored creature man, to all these and the other statutes of that law, from his holy nature, gave his adherence, *cf.* Isa. 56:4. In his nature, as a living personification of finite excellence, designed to transact with God, and rendered fit to adhere to his engagements, and true to the constitutional character of his existence, in the presence of his glorious Lord he stood a being in covenant with Him, *cf.* Hos. 6:7. Had there even not been a representative phase of character provided for Adam, he had, therefore, necessarily, from his very constitution, been in covenant with God, *cf.* Isa. 45:23. A law was made known to him by the great Creator and Ruler, *cf.* Rom. 2:15; a willingness to accept of it as a guide to duty, manifested by receiving it, was given to him, *cf.* Deut. 31:26. To the formation of a covenant, though any other condition that God should propose might be added, nothing more was necessary, *cf.* Ex. 34:28. The covenant due to this was embodied in that which, as we shall presently see was, at his creation, in sovereignty made with him, *cf.* Hos. 8:1.

*Secondly*, this appears from the fact, that the law of God to man in innocence, was given in a covenant form, *cf.* Ezek. 11:19; Jer. 31:33 *and* 24:7. From the very origin of his existence, Adam was placed under the law to God, both as an individual, and as the representative head of the human family, *cf.* Gen. 3:17-19. Under both aspects of his condition (individually and corporately) he was, accordingly, amenable to that law, Gen. 2:17; nay, more, to that law in a covenant form, *cf.* 1 Cor. 15:22.

To him, as an individual, it was promulgated, not merely as a law but as a covenant, *cf.* Deut. 4:13. It could not have been proclaimed to him as the federal head of others, had it not conferred obligation upon him as a moral agent, responsible for his own actions, *cf.* Gal. 4:4. Now, the law that was given to him in his twofold character was, in reality, a condition of a covenant, *cf.* Deut. 28:1. Both the positive precept ("thou shalt not eat") and the statutes of the decalogue unfolded what was designed, as a covenant claim, *cf.* Deut. 10:2-4. The command to obey, implying the command to agree to obey, is an injunction to enter into covenant, and, therefore, itself the condition of a covenant, to be constituted in the acquiescence of the creature addressed, Gen. 2:16, 17. The giving of any command to man, therefore, in a state of innocence, was a recognition of him as a creature from his

constitution designed, and, in the providence of God, to be called, to enter into covenant with Him, *cf.* Deut. 27:26. But this conclusion is corroborated by the very matter of the moral law itself, since we have seen that several of the precepts of that law require covenanting, *cf.* Deut. 5:11. These commands could not have been obeyed as the dictates of God's laws, had the duty of covenanting not been performed, *cf.* Isa. 55:3. And that duty could not have been performed otherwise than in the recognition of the commands of the law as the conditions of a covenant, *cf.* Deut. 29:9. We are warranted to maintain that the covenant of God dispensed to men is in reality a covenant, as appears by comparing the positive precept forbidding the eating of the tree which uses the same terms in which the covenant of God is enjoined, *cf.* Gen. 2:16, 17 *with* Ps. 111:9. A law, when promulgated, cannot but be commanded, Deut. 6:25; a covenant when revealed, as we see here, is commanded, 1 Chron. 16:15. We should take an unwarrantably circumscribed view of the law given to man at the first (in a state of innocence), were we to view it as given as a law, but not as a covenant, *cf.* Hos. 6:7. Even as the matter of the law revealed at Sinai was an exhibition of the provisions of the Covenant of Grace, so that of the law given to man in innocence was the condition of the Covenant of Works, *cf.* Lev. 18:5. It was not merely by the promise, but also by the gift of life, that the positive law was converted into the nature of a covenant, Gal. 3:12. By that promise, indeed, the Covenant of Works was distinguished, Rom. 10:5; that showed the unspeakably beneficent design of the great Creator, and formed the most powerful motive to obedience, *cf.* Ezek. 20:11. Adam was in the enjoyment of good when God revealed to him His law, and God addressed him, not as one who might be doubtful whether or not he should receive good from His hand, but as one in possession of powers and capacities even then appropriating extensive benefits, Eccl. 7:29.

Again, the law of God was given both as a law and as a covenant to Adam, as the representative of the human race, Rom. 5:12. Though the giving of the positive precept put him into a covenant state as a federal head, and though by breaking it he fell, and in consequence of his sin they fell in him, yet it is unwarrantable to maintain that the duty of abstaining from the tree of life was the only condition of the covenant to be observed by him as the public covenant head of his descendants, Rom. 5:15. Would he not have been depraved as an individual personally guilty since he who offends in one point of the law is guilty of all and, thus, would have been unworthy to represent his posterity, Jas. 2:10.

Accordingly, man in his original condition, was, from his constitution, engaged in covenant to God by His law, Gal. 3:10. By a twofold bond, the obligation was laid upon him; the first, the authority of God requiring obedience; the second, the authority of God requiring the fulfilment of an engagement made according to His command, *cf.* Isa. 27:5. Seeing that He determined to create moral subjects on earth, His arrangements provided that He should make them disposed to acquiesce in that law, *cf.* Ps. 110:3; and hence, so long as man continued to possess the moral standing in which he was placed at first, he must have had an impression that by the constitution which had been given him, God was engaged to bestow good upon him, which he was brought under obligation by covenanting to accept, *cf.* Isa. 56:6.