

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting a Privilege of Believers)

“[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 covenanting is a privilege of believers?*

Answer.—Whatever attainment is made by and is distinguished from the wicked, is a spiritual privilege, such as adoption into the family of God, and so is a co-ordinate benefit to which believers are entitled, *cf.* John 1:11, 12 (*power, or right, or, privilege*).

First, believers covenanting are a people near to God and to be near to God is to have special privilege, Ps. 148:14. It is with the lip, and consequently through covenanting, that men draw nigh to honor God and those who honor Him He shall honor, *cf.* 1 Sam. 2:30 and John 12:26. It is the hypocrisy of the Jews, who insincerely attempted this service of covenanting, that is challenged by the words of the prophet Isaiah, Isa. 29:13. While, therefore, He sets before the wicked their sin, He honors His own, or recognizes them as gifted with privilege while they draw near to Him in the duty, Isa. 48:1, 2; Ps. 17:1. To engage in the idolatry of the ancient heathen, or otherwise to fail to recognize God as a God in covenant, was to be far from Him; while to draw near to Him, and, consequently, to acknowledge Him in vowing to Him or otherwise, was good for His saints, Ps. 73:27, 28. Some, as examples of all who were uninterested in the covenant of God, are represented as destitute of what are accounted the privileges of the covenant children; while the attainments of those after their conversion, and which, by being put in contrast with what appertained to them in their former state, must be viewed as spiritual privileges, are represented as consisting in this,—that they were made nigh by the blood of Christ, Eph. 2:12, 13. And, by the apostle Paul, encouragement to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, at once a duty including that of covenanting, and certainly a privilege, is given in his language, Heb. 10:19-23.

Secondly, these covenanting are in the gracious presence of God, Ps. 65:4. The lack of this on the part of the wicked being a curse, the enjoyment of it by the righteous is a privilege, Ps. 84:10. Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, or ceased to attend to the institutions of religion, and thus manifested that he had neither enjoyed nor valued the presence of God reconciled to him, Gen. 4:16. By suffering them to be removed by the Babylonians from their own land, and, consequently, from the ordinances of His grace dispensed in His temple, the LORD cast out the wicked of Jerusalem and Judah from His presence, 2 Kings 24:20. Thereby, He deprived them of those opportunities of enjoying His gracious presence which they had not improved, Ps. 119:155. To His people among the heathen, even though deprived of the public ordinances of Zion, He Himself proved a sanctuary, Isa. 8:14. Moses received from the LORD, on behalf of Israel, the encouragement of His presence going forth with them, Ex. 33:14. The promise must, therefore, have been fulfilled to them throughout their whole journey to Canaan, and especially when about its termination they entered into covenant with Him, Josh. 24:25. The agitation of the earth and heavens, when the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, was a striking intimation that Israel there enjoyed the presence of God, Ps. 68:8. The covenant blessing of peace was bestowed, and, consequently, accepted in His gracious

presence, Num. 6:24-26. Yea, the upright shall come into His presence, confessing His name, and shall continue to enjoy His favoring regard, Ps. 95:2; 140:13 (*thanksgiving, or confessing; thanks, or confess*).

Thirdly, these covenanting see God, Gen. 32:30. As He is in His essential character, no man hath seen God at any time, John 1:18. Even of the Redeemer Himself as to His eternal Godhead, the same is confessed, 1 Tim. 6:16. It would appear to have been some such manifestation of God—altogether incompatible with the capacities of a creature, that was denied to Moses when the LORD warned him, Ex. 33:20. Yet, as Moses, though he did not see the glory of God according to his desire, enjoyed the gracious presence of God, all His people receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. 4:6. By faith, in this manner, both before and after His incarnation, God was to be seen in Christ, and especially on occasions of solemn covenanting, Ex. 24:7-11. It is the blessedness of the pure in heart, that they shall see God, Matt. 5:8. Inviting sinners to come unto Him, and even formally to take hold upon His covenant, the LORD utters a command, Isa. 45:22-24. And lifting up their hand, and their heart, and their eyes to Him, His people obey, Gen. 14:22; Lam. 3:41; Ps. 25:14, 15. From a verb *hāzâ* (הָזַא) that signifies *to see*, come two nouns, one of which, *hōzeh* (הֹזֵה), signifies *a prophet* and *a covenant*, and the other, *hāzût* (חֲזוּת), *a vision, or a revelation, and a covenant*, Isa. 28:15, 18 (where both are translated *agreement*). Hence, a covenant with God, in a sense far higher than what is applicable to an *agreement* with mere men, is made in receiving a revelation of His will, or seeing Him in such a manner as is competent to His people, *cf.* Deut. 4:23, 24; Isa. 30:10. The “cherubim” of the OT, and the “four living creatures” of the NT,—the one representing ministers of religion in both periods, the other symbolizing the ministers of the Gospel in the latter, are both represented as full of eyes, Ezek. 1:18 *and* Rev. 4:6. Thus described, they resemble the prophets of old, denominated “seers,” 1 Sam. 9:9. The many eyes ascribed to them may point out the enlarged capacities which they should have for apprehending Divine things, as well as for rightly observing the dispensations of providence, in order that they might teach the people, *cf.* Eph. 6:19. Thus, from the prophets, and rulers, and seers, who were unfaithful and, therefore, unable to see, to read the vision or covenant, Isa. 29:10-12; and from those who were guilty of idolatry being spoken of as blind, Isa. 42:17, 18; it would appear that both ministers and people, under the former dispensation, when they drew near to Him in covenanting, enjoyed the privilege of “seeing,” Ps. 34:8. So, too, for the Gentiles, enabled to apprehend Christ as given for a light to them, it will be vouchsafed as a privilege to attend to this, Isa. 42:6.

Fourthly, these covenanting, know God, and are known of Him; whereas the heathen, worshipping idols, are represented as not knowing God, Gal. 4:8. And some from among them who had made an insincere profession of religion, are reprov'd for turning from services which, if rightly engaged in, would have been discharged by them in such a manner as to show that they knew God, but which they had never properly performed, Gal. 4:9. To know God is, in reality, by faith to see God, Acts 26:18. As He promised to make Himself known in a vision, Num. 12:6; so He will give His people to know Him in acceding to His covenant, Ps. 25:14. The privilege implies in it a knowledge of the gracious promise of God’s covenant, so that those who enjoy it are those who fear Him, and consequently, who recognize Him as their God, Deut. 5:2. Hence it is that the expressions “to covenant,” and “to know God,” may be put one for the other, as David encouraging Solomon to cleave to the LORD in covenant makes clear, 1 Chron. 28:9. So,

the Egyptians, when entering into covenant with God, are said to know Him, Isa. 19:21. And hence, all brought to acknowledge Him in this manner are truly blessed, John 17:3.

Fifthly, to these covenanting, the LORD is favorable, for He extends to them the light of His countenance, Ps. 4:5, 6. And He accepts them, Isa. 45:19 *and* Rom. 12:1; 15:16.

Sixthly, these covenanting, enjoy communion with God, Hag. 2:5. The wicked do not use the name of God, in swearing by Him, with acceptance, Jer. 44:26; yet, His people do, Jer. 4:2. The LORD dwells among His people continually, Ps. 132:14; hence, He is among them when they engage in vowing and swearing to Him, as the language of prophecy holds forth representing the LORD returning to them while performing this duty, Zech. 2:10, 11. Entering into covenant with Him, they feast before Him, *cf.* Gen. 26:28-30. The dispensation of all the ordinances of religion is represented as a feast, Isa. 1:14; and not less than of any of them is that of covenanting, *cf.* Ex. 34:10, 18. A feast is a token of friendship, 2 Sam. 3:20. Special solemnities among the people of Israel were designated feasts, Ex. 12:14. Covenanting with God sometimes entered into the religious exercises performed at feasts, Nah. 1:15. The blessings of salvation are offered as the rich provision of a sumptuous feast, provided and given, by the LORD Himself, Zech. 14:16-19. And the reception of them in this exercise belongs to the privilege of those accepted before Him, Isa. 25:6-9.

Finally, by His love the LORD constrains His people to take hold of the covenant, John 6:44, 45. Because of the love of God, His chosen are called at once to duty and privilege, Isa. 63:9. Duty they perform through the influence of His love shed abroad in their hearts, Rom. 5:5; and they enjoy privilege by His love extending to them, Song 1:4. So, the Lord Jesus can enjoin His disciples in this exercise, John 14:15. Moreover, this injunction extends to the command regarding the commemorating of His death, 1 Cor. 11:24, 25. And His people, under the influence of love to Him, obey, 2 Cor. 5:14, 15. But in drawing near to God in the ordinance of the Supper, and in other explicit acts of covenanting, they enjoy the manifestations of His love, Song 2:4. Even as Jonathan, after David and he had entered into a covenant of the LORD, caused David to swear again because he loved him, 1 Sam. 20:16, 17. Thus, the LORD causes His people, whom by His love He had drawn to Himself, to swear by His name, Jer. 31:3; Hos. 11:4.