

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Confession and Personal 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 ought we to think of confession?*

Answer.—In Scripture, the words “confess” (*yādā*; אָדָּא) and “confession” (*tōdā*; תְּוָדָּא) are often used in reference to the subject of covenanting, Dan. 9:4. The word “confess” is sometimes used in regard to God as an object, and sometimes in reference to men, Josh. 7:19; Lev. 5:5; moreover, to “confess” to God, or to name the name of God, means to perform services which include covenanting, 1 Kings 8:33-36. The people of Israel were peculiarly exposed to the sin of idolatry and, for that sin in which transgressed the covenant, they had been carried away from the land promised in covenant to their fathers, Josh. 23:16. When they should be restored they would take into their mouth, instead of the names of idols, the name of God, and that by taking hold upon His covenant, Zech. 13:2, 9. Thus, at the restoration of Israel, the exercise of confessing the name of the LORD, corresponds to that of joining to Him in a perpetual covenant, Jer. 50:4, 5. The verb “confess” in Hebrew (*yādā*; אָדָּא; in the LXX, ἐξομολογέομαι, *exomologēomai*), when connected with the name of God, must carry the same sense, Ps. 106:45, 47. The verb used by the Greek translators (in the LXX) often carries the same connotation when it is used in the New Testament, as appears in the case of that treacherous transaction between Judas and the chief priests and captains, where taking hold of the evil contract is denoted as an act of covenanting, Luke 22:5, 6 (“he promised,” “he confessed, or covenanted,” ἐξωμολόγησεν, *exōmologēsen*). So, the vow referenced in the Psalms, which should be adopted by the people of God in the presence of the Gentiles, was, that they would covenant with Him, Psalm 18:49; Rom. 15:8, 9. It was the promises of the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, that Christ came to confirm, Rom. 9:4, 5; Col. 2:11, 12. The Gentiles could not glorify God for His mercy without cleaving to that covenant, Acts 3:25; Jer. 31:33; and it was by believers making manifestations of attachment to that covenant, of which covenanting was one, that the Gentiles should be brought to adhere to it, Isa. 56:6. We read, then, that both the Jew and the Gentile must “confess” (ἐξομολογήσεται, *exōmologēsētai*) that Jesus Christ is LORD, which is an oath and, accordingly includes in it, to covenant, Phil. 2:9-11. Moreover, this passage is clearly an application of the words of the prophet to the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Isa. 45:23 (*šāba* ; שָׁבַע; to swear, or make an oath). This same Scripture verse is quoted by Paul to demonstrate that the One unto whom that act of covenanting is directed, or the oath made, is the same One Who will preside over the final Judgment, Rom. 14:10, 11.

Another related verb, *homologeō* (ὁμολογέω) in the Greek New Testament, often translated “confess,” is used to designate the act by which a person enters into an agreement, or covenant, with another, Matt. 14:7 (*hōmologēsen*, ὁμολόγησεν; “he promised”). Thus, the apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews, makes mention of “giving thanks,” or “confessing” (*homologountōn*, ὁμολογούντων), in tandem with the sacrifice of praise, Heb. 13:15. Now, the making of a vow was often a sacrifice, Num. 29:39; and the making of a vow is included in the confessing to His name, Ps. 50:14. In this, he shows

that the covenant together with its promises, which was confirmed by sacrifice, is laid hold of through the making of vows, Ps. 61:5 (*neder*, נָדָה, "vow").

When either of these Greek terms is used, without limitation, and God is the object, it bears the meaning "to covenant," Acts 19:18. Thus, those passages of prophecy and fulfillment each intimate the acknowledgement of sin, the giving of thanks to God and the exercise of covenanting with Him, *cf.* Isa. 45:23, 24, and Rom. 14:11; 15:9.

When the object of confession in any passage is not adverted to, and the subject of the confession is not stated, "to confess" there means "to covenant," John 12:42. The object must be either God, or men, or both; and, consequently, there is often a making of acknowledgements before men while simultaneously taking hold of God by covenant, so that "to confess" Christ signifies "to covenant," Rom. 10:9, 10. Moreover, we see in our English version of the Old Testament that "to make confession" describes at once exercises of confessing sin, and of covenanting, 2 Chron. 29:10; 30:21, 22. Elsewhere, in the exercises of Daniel as an individual, it is manifest that to make "confession" involves acknowledging of sin as well as taking hold on God's covenant, Dan. 9:4.

The phrase "to profess" is, when used in connection with godliness or true religion, in the New Testament, equivalent to "to confess," 1 Tim. 6:12 (*homologeō*, ὁμολογέω). To profess either the knowledge of God, or godliness, or a good profession, or faith, or subjection to the Gospel, corresponds to the act of professing Christ and is, therefore, of the same import as "to covenant," Tit. 1:16. If it is performed to men, it is to bear testimony to the truth, Matt. 7:23. If not represented as performed either to God or men, it is to be understood as being, according to their respective characters, performed to both and, accordingly, it must be understood not mere to signify the testifying of the truth of God before the world, but also to engage in the exercise of covenanting, 2 Cor. 9:13.

Another verb is sometimes translated as "professed," and other times "promised," in this sense, also bears the connotation of "to covenant," *cf.* Mark 14:11 (*epangellomai*; ἐπαγγέλλομαι, "promised") with Luke 22:5, 6 (*suntithēmi*; συντίθημι, "covenanted, or contracted"). So, the exercise of covenanting must be understood as being referenced in many of the uses of this verb *epangellomai*, especially in those cases when translated "professed," Heb. 10:23. It bearing the sense of covenanting in conjunction with the sense of bearing testimony is observable in passages wherein failure to bear testimony is noted as a breach of covenant, or "profession," 1 Tim. 6:20, 21. Thus, fidelity in covenanting demands certain forms of testimony-bearing, or "profession," 1 Tim. 2:9, 10.

Finally, the term "profession" when used in the same connection, is equivalent to the term "confession," including in its import the exercise of covenanting, whereby Jesus Christ is called the high priest of our "profession," or "covenant," Heb. 3:1. In this aspect of His character, the Redeemer was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto our father, Rom. 15:8; and under this, He taught the people to manifest in every possible manner their attachment to God's covenant, duties which they would not perform, if in making confession to God they had not acquiesced in His covenant, Heb. 4:14.

Question 2.—*What is meant by personal covenanting?*

Answer.—Personal covenanting is an act of adherence to God's covenant whereby the person exercises himself by giving acquiescence to that covenant in its whole character, 2 Kings 5:17. It is not a simple acquiescence of heart to the covenant but an acquiescence in a positive service to the cause and end of that covenant, Deut. 26:17. In this act of covenanting, the covenanting believer, like the people of Israel with Josiah their king,

through this exercise, stand (*ʿamad*; אָמַד, “support”) to the covenant, 2 Kings 23:3. In so doing, the person takes hold upon the covenant, and cleaves to it, engaging to it absolutely, taking the LORD to be the God by Whom and unto Whom he binds his soul, Ps. 119:106. This is demonstrated in the language used, such as that of Jacob in this exercise, Gen. 28:21.

First, there is in this covenanting a solemn act approving of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, Ex. 15:2. In every religious exercise, there is an approval of this method of restoration to the favor of God but in covenanting this is specially intimated, Ps. 56:12. So, God describes Himself, when Israel is about to engage in covenanting individually, as Redeemer, while making an appeal to encourage them to this exercise, Isa. 44:6, 8. Elsewhere, the children of Israel are invited to this exercise of covenanting to make their return to God and their acceptance of this invitation is set forth in terms appropriate for both individual and social use, Jer. 3:22, 23. David expresses his satisfaction in accepting these terms when he takes hold of God’s covenant, 2 Sam. 23:5. In every acceptable exercise of performing this act, the believer is called upon to declare himself to be on the Lord’s side, through an approval of the terms, John 6:67, 68.

Second, covenanting is a solemn act of accepting Christ and all His benefits, Rom. 10:9, 10. Yet, this has been the practice of many who had previously known the grace of God, as is to be seen in the nation of Israel whom, having heard promise made to Abraham and looking forward to Messiah, Gen. 22:18; in their early days, when they were about to enter the promised land, they went forth, by the grace of God, to receive these promises by an exercise of covenanting, Jer. 2:2, 3. Later, when renewing this covenant of God in the land of Moab, they were exhorted to make choice of Him as their life, Deut. 30:19, 20. David illustrates this practice in his exercise of personal covenanting, Ps. 16:2-5. When Jesus appeared in the flesh, some who had believed in the Messiah to come, and were true believers, as John the Baptist, confess as an act of appropriation and testimony bearing, John 1:29; or, Nathanael, John 1:49. So, too, Thomas and Peter testify, in an exercise of covenanting, their acceptance of and avouching of Him, John 20:28; 21:17 *compared with* Deut. 6:5.

Third, covenanting is a solemn act of renouncing the claims of the world, the flesh and the devil, upon both heart and life, because where Christ is received, Satan is cast out by the power of the Spirit, Isa. 26:13. The resolution to abandon Satan and his cause is necessarily involved in all covenant engagement, Hos. 14:2, 3, 8. The command to “be ye separate” entails not merely separating from evil, 2 Cor. 6:16-18; but corresponds to the prophetic command “be ye clean,” Isa. 52:11; in the exercise of covenanting to accomplish it, Ezek. 20:37, 38. So, the Lord purged out the heathen from among the returning Jews in Jerusalem, and they ratified this by solemn covenant, Neh. 10:28, 29.

Fourth, covenanting includes voluntary self-dedication to God, willingly acknowledging the right which God, by creation and redemption, has in the whole man, Isa. 43:1; and is expressed in the language of the Psalmist, Ps. 119:94. It is grounded in the requirement held forth, Josh. 24:14; and the cheerful offer of perpetual obedience to God’s law, Ps. 116:16; 119:43, 44. Therein, the covenanter takes shelter and finds spiritual rest, Ps. 61:4, 5. There is a declaration of this self-dedication to both God and the world, Isa. 44:5. Moreover, this self-dedication may be done collectively as well as individually, 2 Cor. 8:5.

Finally, covenanting is a solemn act in which certain promises are made to God to perform certain duties, whether to abstain from besetting sins or increase of use of the means of grace, *cf.* Gen. 28:20-22; 1 Sam. 1:11; *etc.*