

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Duty of Covenanting, 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 covenanting is a duty?*

Answer.—God, as the Supreme Moral Governor of all, has enjoined that His covenant should be acceded unto, by men in every age and condition, by exercising themselves in covenanting, as sanctioned by His high authority, Ps. 111:9. This exercise is inculcated according to the will of God, as King and LORD of all, Ps. 95:3, 6, 7. And explicitly, in the same connection are the various observances included in it presented in precept, Deut. 10:14, 17, 20.

Moreover, this observance is a debt of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, as possessed of all power in heaven and in earth, Matt. 28:19. He is the King in Zion, *cf.* Zech. 9:9 *with* Matt. 21:4, 5; the Governor among the nations, Ps. 22:28; and the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, Eph. 1:22, 23. So, all are called to honor the Son, even as they honor the Father, John 5:23; for that service due to God as the righteous ruler of all, is due to the Son, as holding a universal mediatorial dominion which shall not pass away, Dan. 7:14. The law of God is the law of Christ, *cf.* Isa. 58:6 *with* Gal. 6:2; and obedience to Christ is subjection to God, 2 Cor. 10:5; Rom. 16:26. Thus, the Lord Jesus commands the performance as duty to Himself, Ps. 45:10, 11. Therefore, in terms applicable in every age, as their Lord and Master, He has told His disciples to *confess* (*homologēsō*; ὁμολογήσω) Him before men, Matt. 10:32, 33. And He having both died and risen, and revived, that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living, claims the individual parts of the exercise of covenanting (*confess*; *exomologēsetai*; ἐξομολογήσεται) as homage to His name, Rom. 14:9-11.

Question 2.—*How ought believers to engage in this duty?*

Answer.—Believers engaging in personal covenanting, act as being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ, 1 Cor. 9:21. It is as the *servants* of God they thus transact with Him, even as Jacob, as well as others who have vowed to God without being condemned, 1 Chron. 16:13. They are addressed individually, as well as collectively, as those yielding an acceptable obedience, Isa. 44:1. So, it is their practice which is fulfilled in prophecy (which is itself a command), Isa. 44:5. Likewise, the churches of Macedonia covenanted with God as is manifest, 2 Cor. 8:5. Significantly, in writing to the Thessalonians, one of those churches in Macedonia, Paul describes them, as in that, and in consequent performances, as serving God, 1 Thess. 1:9. Nor without entertaining apprehension that in that exercise he served God, could the Psalmist performing it proclaim himself a servant, Ps. 116:16. Moreover, every believer is a good *soldier* (one *pledged* to allegiance) of Jesus Christ, 2 Tim. 2:3; each one being called by His authoritative command, as well as by the effectual influences of His Spirit, Rev. 17:14. Each, like the governors and people of Israel, who, on a memorable occasion, at God’s command, offered themselves willingly—each being made willing in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3)—resolving and vowing to follow the LORD fully, doing obeisance to the divine mandate, covenanting to serve Him who is given for a Leader, Isa. 55:3, 4. Besides, each

one who lawfully vows to God, in vowing discharges a function of a loyal *subject* of God's government, for in vowing God is invoked as King, Ps. 5:2. As the swearing of allegiance to an earthly monarch is a act of obedience to law, so in vowing or swearing to God there is paid to Him a tribute of duty, 1 Chron. 29:24 (*submitted*, lit. *they gave the hand under*). Finally, in this service the LORD is obeyed as God, because the titles of, a master, a lord, a captain, a king, among men, are valid only when held in subjection to the King and Lord of all, Rev. 19:16. The highest supremacy that belongs to creatures is limited, and exercised only by deputation from Him who is over all and blessed forever, Rom. 13:1. And as the claims of power, because armed with His authority, cannot without rebellion against Him be set aside; much more, His, without aggravated hostility toward Him, cannot be disputed, Isa. 33:22. Accordingly, they who invoke His name, in vowing to Him, acknowledge and approve His power and authority, Gen. 4:26; whereas the refusal of His enemies to call upon Him manifests their rebellion, Ps. 10:4. His people avouching Him to be their God obey Him, Jer. 7:23; in compliance with the mandate they take hold of His covenant, and in commemoration of their act, in terms of the highest deed of appropriation, they own Him as their God, Ps. 31:14.

Question 3.—*How ought the church, in an ecclesiastical capacity, to engage in this duty?*

Answer.—Social covenanting engaged in by the church of God, in an ecclesiastical capacity, is an act of obedience to His word, 2 Cor. 8:5. That community, in its organization and laws is essentially distinct from civil society, one throughout every age, and embracing the saints of every land, as one body, by God, as “My servant,” Isa. 44:21; Lev. 25:42; John 12:26. Whatsoever, therefore, is practiced by the church in her collective capacity, however denominated, and without rebuke, is performed by her in this character of servant, Isa. 44:1, 2. Thus, introduced as “Israel,” or “Jacob,” or “My people,” or any other name, and vowing or swearing to the LORD, she appears under the aspect of a chosen society performing this duty, Nah. 1:15; Ps. 105:10. Each promise and prophecy delivered concerning this, as each other allowable exercise, assumes the features of a precept, and each performance of it in truth, the marks of a warranted service, Ps. 72:11. Thus, at Horeb, before the mission of Moses to Egypt, for the deliverance of Israel, the LORD, with regard to the solemnities of covenanting that were there to occur, said of the church in the wilderness, she was to serve God, Ex. 3:12. Commanding and exhorting to engage in solemn covenant renovation, Hezekiah said to Israel to covenant and, thereby, serve the LORD, 2 Chron. 30:8 (*yield yourselves*; lit. *give the hand*). There is no reason for maintaining that the apostle enjoined not the exercise of social, but merely that of personal covenanting, when he addressed the church of Rome, Rom. 12:1.

Question 4.—*How ought the church, in an ecclesiastical and national capacity, to engage in this duty?*

Answer.—The exercise of social covenanting with God, performed by His church both in an ecclesiastical and a national capacity, is a part of His service, Isa. 44:5. Being a religious observance, this cannot be performed by the members of the church collectively, whether united ecclesiastically or otherwise, if not associated as the church of God, Isa. 60:12. But also when, united both ecclesiastically and in a national capacity, they address themselves to it, they discharge an obligation incumbent upon them, for the Lord is the King of the saints, Rev. 15:3. Ruled by His laws, these, not merely in their ecclesiastical, but also in their civil relations, do homage to Him, Rev. 2:26, 27. Under two aspects in their social capacity they appear:

First, in subjection to Him as King of Zion, Ps. 2:6. United to Christ their spiritual Head, and to one another in Him, they are members of one glorious body, Eph. 5:30. And being members of His church, they are under Him, as its sole Head, and Lawgiver, and Governor and King, Ps. 44:4. As one community, in their faith, their worship, their discipline, their government, and communion, they are under His authority, Eph. 1:22. Judges, and magistrates, and kings, having power in civil society, are recognized with divine approbation, 1 Pet. 2:17. However, these who bear rule in civil life are subject to He Who is King of kings and Lord of lords, 1 Tim. 6:15. On the other hand, there is no human head of the church, in His house, Jesus is the only Head and Lord and King over all, Col. 1:18. The apostles of our Lord were among those who, in the council held at Jerusalem, several years after the ascension of Christ, acted as rulers in His church by enacting a law which applied to Christians at Antioch and elsewhere, Acts 15:28; 16:4. Their conduct on this occasion, and to all others exercising authority in the church on like occasions, was an apt example, according to Christ's injunction, Matt. 23:8-10. The jurisdiction of the rulers in the church is distinct from that of the civil rulers, Matt. 18:18-20. Ecclesiastical powers are spiritual, and with these powers the civil have no right to interfere, 2 Chron. 26:18.

Second, as members of civil society, under Him as King of nations, they also appear, Acts 21:39. Distinct from the organization of the church, but also under Christ, is the constitution of civil society, Ps. 2:10-12. The whole structure of civil government is derived from God as the moral Governor of the universe, but is put under Christ as the Mediator, Rev. 11:15. Whereas the laws of the church remain immutable, being conducive to the immediate glory of God, Matt. 15:9; the laws of civil society may vary with the course of providence, and yet be still consistent with the perfect standard of moral procedure, glorifying God mediately, *cf.* 1 Pet. 2:13 *with* Rom. 13:2. Therefore, although the laws of the house of God, like the Ten Commandments, are applicable to all men, at all times, Deut. 12:32; 1 John 2:3, 4; civil laws, or enactments, may vary in their absolute character, according to the state of society, as long as they do not transgress the limits fixed by the moral law, Prov. 8:15, 16; Rom. 16:26; Est. 3:8. The facts occurring in providence, enlarge not the compass of those laws that were promulgated by the King of Zion to her communion, but demand their application, Acts 17:25. The laws of civil society ought never to conflict with the principles of eternal righteousness, but with observation and discovery, and every change of providence, it behooves them to keep pace, 1 Tim. 2:2. In ecclesiastical society, the Lord Jesus is recognized as the immediate Lawgiver, Matt. 28:20; in civil, He must be acknowledged as supreme Lawgiver, bestowing civil power to be exercised agreeable to His revealed will, 2 Sam. 23:3; which unfolds the mutual obligations, of nations and rulers to one another, and of both to Himself, Ezra 6:10, 22.

That is swearing or vowing to God in both capacities they serve Him, appears from various considerations, for the people of Israel are represented in Scripture as a nation, and as in this national character covenanting, at Sinai and at Moab, Ex. 34:10; Deut. 5:2. They sustained this character under the kings of David's line, 2 Sam. 23:5; and they will, in Gospel times, be united to such a relation, Ezek. 37:22, 26. Under Asa and Josiah, the people in their civil capacities covenanted, 2 Chron. 15:12; 34:31. As a nation, after their return from Babylon, the people and their rulers entered into covenant, Neh. 9:38. After their restoration, they will acknowledge the Messiah as their King, Ezek. 37:25. And the Gentile nations, in due time, shall do homage to Him as prince of the kings of the earth, Isa. 49:22, 23. This they shall do as willing servants obeying His commands, Rev. 21:24.