

## ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenant Duties, Part 4)

“[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.—*What duties to Christ the Mediator ought covenanting to engage?*

*Answer.*—Covenanting should engage all to duties to the Mediator as Lord of all because by God all have life and being, Rom. 14:7, 8. To seek the LORD, and to walk after the LORD, are the sum of all the obedience to Him which He requires, and the substance of what is to be vowed and sworn to perform, 2 Chron. 15:12; 2 Kings 23:3. These duties to God, ought to be performed to Christ, Matt. 28:18; John 5:23. These duties are, in general:

*First*, to declare the glory of God, which includes every duty required of man, ought to be vowed, Ps. 86:12. Moreover, in some instances the vowing to glorify Him, has been predicted of the nations, Ps. 86:9.

*Second*, to maintain the truth by the profession and practice of it, because all idolatry consists in withholding from God the glory due to Him, Rom. 1:21, 23. The truth of God was committed to His people in the charge which they accepted in covenanting, Deut. 11:1. The Redeemer commands it to be held fast, Rev. 3:3. The covenant people of God are a nation which keeps the truth, Isa. 26:2.

*Third*, the truth of God’s character ought to be maintained, to which end He made Himself known as the Trinity of Divine Persons in essential and substantial unity, 1 John 5:7. This includes: 1.) The truth of the underived majesty of God’s government over all things, Rev. 4:11. 2.) The relations of the Divine Persons of the Trinity confederated in the everlasting covenant for the salvation of man, Matt. 28:19. 3.) The Mediatorial character and glory of Christ, as the great Prophet, Priest and King of the church, Acts 3:21, 22; Heb. 5:5; Matt. 21:5. 4.) The illuminating influences of the Word and Spirit of Christ, 2 Thess. 2:13, 14. 5.) The atonement and intercession of Christ, Heb. 7:24, 25.

*Fourth*, to maintain the testimony on behalf of the Headship of Christ, Eph. 1:22, 23. This Headship is over the church in every age and, though sometimes disputed and often disregarded, it has never been disproved, Col. 1:18. Moreover, this Headship over the nations is taught in Scripture not less clearly than that over the church, Col. 2:10. In order to the extension of the acknowledgement of the mediatorial power over all the kingdoms of the world, an exhibition of the prerogatives and claims upon these of the Redeemer, should explicitly be made in testifying for Him, by a Scriptural profession, and practical observance of His commands, embodied in solemn covenanting, Ps. 101:3, 6; 145:1, 5, 10-13.

*Fifth*, to maintain the truth of the depravity of man and his inability to restore himself to God’s favor, Rom. 8:7, 8. The entire corruption of the human nature by sin, original sin, the dominion of sin in the unconverted, and its power in the people of God, are made known in the Divine word, Eph. 2:3. These should enter into a solemn profession of the truth, Ps. 38:18; 19:12, 13.

*Sixth*, to testify against error and its consequences, for it is necessary to denounce heathenism and condemn it, as originating in the corruption of true religion, Rom. 1:22, 23;

making progress by assimilating to itself the corruptions of the human heart under the influence of Satan, and tending toward the ruin of the soul, Acts 26:18. The glorious truth of God should be displayed in contrast with every kind of infidelity—whether Jewish or Gentile, Mohammedan or Socinian on the one hand, and Popery and Prelacy on the other, and every other false system, Ps. 60:4.

Question 2.—*What conclusions may we draw regarding our covenant duties?*

*Answer.*—There are several conclusions which ought to draw:

*First*, covenanting should engage all to every former good attainment, 1 Tim. 4:6. The obligation of a permanent duty cannot be dissolved, *cf.* Deut. 7:2, 3; but the observance of it may and ought to be vowed successively, Judg. 21:1, 7, 18. For a reason, the same as, or similar to, that for which it was vowed at first, it may, on some occasions, be promised by vow and oath again, Ps. 116:14, 18. The Divine law holds every moral being bound to duty, Jas. 2:8, 10-12; yet it admits, even commands, the making of promises in covenanting to do it, Deut. 6:13. As the original command to obey does not render the vow unnecessary, Deut. 29:12; so, neither does one vow remove the necessity for another, Ezra 10:5. Though on account of the esteemed and real solemnity of that original covenant, it is not requisite that it be renewed in the formal manner in which it was first made, Deut. 7:8; Judg. 2:15; it is, nevertheless, manifest from Scripture, inculcating the use of the vow, that the parties may thereafter vow to God to continue to fulfil their first engagements, Jer. 2:2; Rev. 2:4. We are warranted to maintain that what was covenanted before, no less than it should be performed, should be vowed again, Phil. 3:16.

*Second*, in covenanting, there should be made engagements to cleave to new correct views of truth and duty, Ps. 24:4. Every increase made in the knowledge of God demands a corresponding acknowledgement, Jer. 9:24. When one enemy of His kingdom appears, vows should be made to resist and overthrow his influence, Isa. 59:19. When many foes appear, new vows of an appropriate kind should be entered into against them, Ps. 3:1-3; 22:25. When duty presents itself, covenant engagements should be made to perform it, Deut. 23:21. With the enlargement of the field of duty, should proceed the enlargement of covenant promises, in dependence on Divine aid to overtake it, Ps. 119:106, 107. According to the display of God's glorious goodness and mercy, should be the solemn engagements of His people to give it celebration, Isa. 65:16. If one view of His glory calls to the exercise, every brighter view will invite it, until both engagements and their fulfilment merge into eternal unbroken obedience in heaven, Jer. 4:2.

*Third*, in covenanting, there should be made engagements to abandon whatever evil unobserved there may be in the vow made, or whatever may be inconsistent with its lawful parts, Lev. 26:40, 42. A vow may sometimes be sinful, notwithstanding the use of the utmost care to make it in consistency with the calls of duty, Jer. 5:2. The sinful parts are due to the imperfection of the individual who makes it, Lev. 5:4; the lawful part alone is obligatory, Lev. 5:5. The making of the good part of the vow ought not to be refrained from on account of a dread of associating with that a part that might be evil, Gen. 50:25. Even if vowed in ignorance, evil involves in sin, Num. 15:22-29. When discovered in its true character, it ought to be discarded, 1 John 1:9. When the vow is made, there should be included in it the engagement, to refrain, as soon as it is discovered, from performing any part of it, which, having been sinful, and therefore possessed of no obligation, ought not to have entered into it, Acts 23:21; 1 Thess. 5:21. Nothing, indeed, but a sense of propriety can hinder men from claiming the performance of the engagements, even of an

evil character, that are made to them, 1 Sam. 14:26-28. But God Who commands that only what is good be vowed, disapproves of such a demand, as well as of the engagement on which it is based, Lev. 19:12.

*Fourth*, covenanting does not shackle inquiry, Isa. 8:20. While it is true that it is sinful to endeavor to make inquiry for the purpose of evading an engagement made by a vow of a lawful nature, Prov. 20:25; an imperfect vow, on account of its imperfection, requires correction and should lead to its improvement, Num. 6:21. To engage absolutely to perform any act, is not obligatory, it is only when the LORD will that even duty can be done, Jas. 4:15. Moreover, only what God requires should be done, whether vowed or not, Jas. 4:12; therefore, a covenant engagement, in which is promised more than what is dutiful, is not lawful, Deut. 6:13. In order to lead to duty alone, an engagement by vow should be made, Deut. 10:20. It is alike foreign to the nature and to the end of a covenant, for those who enter into it to make their engagement independently of a reference to circumstances that may be unforeseen, Gen. 24:2, 8, 41. So, not to vow to engage to duty is evil, even as to vow to accomplish an act, whether it may be found afterwards to be sinful or not, is also evil, 2 Chron. 34:31.

*Finally*, the wicked, whether individuals or communities, and these alone, are not in covenant, Eph. 2:12. Man in innocence was never under the law of God merely as a law, Gal. 3:12. The will of God, promulgated as the terms both of a covenant and a law, had the sacredness of a law, Rom. 10:5; acceded to by man, it had all the sanctity of a covenant, Gen. 2:16, 17. The will of God was propounded as a law, to be received both as a law and as a covenant, Ps. 105:10; the acceptance of it engaged man to it as possessed of both characters, Ex. 24:7, 8, 12. Because of God's authority dictating it as a law, His will revealed conferred obligation, Deut. 4:8, 44. Because of God's will and providential arrangements as to the constitution of man, he acquiescing in the requirement of the law came besides under a covenant obligation to fulfil it, Deut. 4:13, 23. Because at the origin of his being man was placed under both obligations, at his fall the whole human family became exposed to the curse at once of a broken law and a violated covenant, Isa. 24:5. What was the Covenant of Works is not now a covenant to any, because to the wicked it is a law which by reason of their sin tends to their ruin, Rom. 3:10-12. The work of the law is written upon the hearts of men in sin, but not as if it were now a covenant law, Rom. 2:15; for now, the Covenant of Works, as a covenant of reward, has no demand of obedience to it on men, it only seeks only that obedience which, for past and present transgressions, demands punishment, Isa. 28:15.

The will of God revealed to men in a state of sin, has the character of a law, but not of a covenant, 1 Tim. 1:9. The impenitent transgressor continues under the curse of the law, Gal. 3:10. If not subdued by Divine grace, he will continue to feel here the effects of the wrath of God, Rom. 1:18; and in the future state will experience the effects of the curse, 2 Thess. 1:9. The law of God addressed to corrupt ecclesiastical societies, is not a covenant, but essentially a law, Rev. 2:5, 16. Likewise, a national compact between rulers and people, when violated, is similar: the laws, or institutions, or ordinances, of a nation, according to which sovereigns reign and other rulers govern and the people give voluntary obedience, is a covenant, 2 Chron. 23:16; but against those who violate them, whatever may be their rank, they act not as a covenant but as a law, punishing for breach of covenant, Lev. 26:25.