

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting Adapted to the Moral Constitution of Man, Part 2)

“[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 is covenanting adapted to the moral constitution of man in a state of grace?*

Answer.—*First*, inasmuch as gracious capacities lead to acquiescence in what God requires, covenanting is adapted to the moral constitution of man in a state of grace, Heb. 13:21. All the powers of man, either directly or indirectly, were injured and misdirected by the fall, Rom. 5:6. The range of the intellect was circumscribed, and its power was diminished, Col. 3:10. The affections were deadened, and subjected to unholy influences, Col. 3:2, 5; the conscience became callous, and unfit to testify for God as it had formerly done, 1 Tim. 4:2; and the will was exercised to do only evil, and that continually, Gen. 6:5. From the moral nature of man proceeded all the evils that overtook his constitution in consequence of sin, Eccl. 9:3. That moral nature suffered the taint of a depravity that exposed the sinner to ruin, Eph. 2:1-3; and the curse of the broken law went out through it, to mar and destroy, Tit. 3:3. Man by nature is degraded, because he is chargeable with original and actual sin, and because he wills not to obey God, Rom. 3:10, 12. Of every characteristic of a creature in covenant with Him, he is destitute, Hos. 6:7. Between the tendencies of his nature, and the demands of the Divine law, there is no correspondence, Rom. 8:7. But in the day of effectual calling, a complete change is produced upon the moral tendencies of the soul, 2 Cor. 8:1-3, 12, 16. Before that day, it is said, “ye will not come to me,” John 5:40; afterwards, the soul uses very different language, Ps. 73:28. Men, in their fallen state of sin, have addressed to them certain Divine mandates, Isa. 42:18; men renewed, do each respond willingly, Ps. 85:8; Mic. 7:7. To the wicked is addressed certain reproofs, Ps. 4:2; to the righteous belongs a very different description which displays their renewal, Isa. 56:6. Of unbelievers, it is declared, both their mind and conscience is defiled, Tit. 1:15; conversely, of those who live by faith, the Scriptures pronounce another judgment, Heb. 9:14. Of those who, though professedly the people of God, were but hypocrites, a record of their unbelief is given, Ps. 81:11; whereas those who had submitted to Him, the apostle gives testimony to their willingness wrought in them, Phil. 2:13. Thus, those who are born again, are rendered fit to lay hold upon the proposals of God’s goodness and mercy through Christ, John 3:27. Such are a people made willing in a day of power, Ps. 110:3. Corruption continues within them, but it is subdued, Rom. 6:18, 22. They delight in the law of God after the inward man, Rom. 7:22. To the requirement of a covenant like that of works, their resolutions and endeavors are alike inadequate, Gal. 2:16. Under the dispensations of Divine grace, however, no proposals of any covenant designed to confer life through their own obedience is made to them, Phil. 3:9. It is on a covenant, the conditions of which were fully satisfied by One infinitely qualified for His work, that they are invited to take hold, and the powers conferred upon them correspond to the exercise, Rom. 3:24. Imperfection marks the nature of the Christian, even throughout all his earthly career, Gal. 5:17; but the means to be employed by him in making covenant engagements to the LORD, do not less accord to His new

covenant relation to him, than those made by him in innocence, did to his first covenant state, Rom. 6:15-18; and not less are his gracious powers and faculties suited to the one, than the original gifts conferred upon him, were adapted to the other, Eph. 4:24.

Secondly, inasmuch as the invitations to accede to the Covenant of Grace are tendered to sinners, and through the operation of the Spirit are accepted by those who are born again, John 5:24. The offering of free favor to man must imply the possibility of him, aided in some manner, accepting it, Rom. 12:2. Had the rational nature of man been destroyed by the fall, then a re-organization of him must have preceded the reception on his part of the benefits offered, Eph. 4:23. But regeneration, and not re-organization, is experienced by him when he is enabled to lay hold of God's covenant, Ps. 51:10. The former, not less wondrous, perhaps more wondrous than the latter would have been, brings the sinful creature from the state of one exposed to the curse of the law, as both a covenant and a law, to that of one engaged to the duties of a permanent covenant, Ezek. 36:26; 37:26. By regeneration, the intellectual character of the human mind is not changed, nor thereby are changed the conscience and affections and capacity to will, Col. 1:13. By regeneration the personal identity of the sinner is not altered, Acts 9:11; for it is the same being that sinned who is saved, Acts 9:17, 18. But by regeneration the tendencies of the moral nature are changed, and modifications most important are produced upon the operations of the powers of the whole man, John 8:34, 36; in one word, the heart in being brought under the gracious influence is renewed, and thus is made to possess the character of a new heart, Ezek. 11:19, 20. It is not as if man in sin were altogether ignorant of what God requires, but because he is unwilling to obey, that he does not yield to it, Ps. 14:1-3. His disobedience is not as if that requirement were inconsistent with his natural powers, but as opposed by their tendency, Jas. 1:14. It is not as if obedience were foreign to his nature, but because it is repugnant to his will, Mark 7:21-23. But when the sinner is renewed, the requirement of the duty takes effect, Rom. 7:18. The law of God demands all what all ought to give, but what man, in consequence of sin, because he is unwilling, is unable to give, Isa. 64:6. That law demands of all what believers are desirous to render, but which of themselves they are unable to implement, and the part of which that is accepted they are enabled by Divine grace alone to perform, Rom. 7:15; Eph. 2:8. Calls to exercise of covenanting addressed to men, whether in a state of sin or in a state of grace, though differently apprehended by them, being in a varied manner understood by both, must be in accordance with that is common to the nature of each, and also to that of man in innocence, Mark 7:8, 9. The wicked show that they know what these calls imply, Rom. 1:19, 20; for they often refuse to attend to them after any manner, and when they attempt to act according to them, they aim at an end that is not elevated above deliverance merely from the effects of sin, not to say comprehensive of the glory of God, Rom. 1:21-23. And the righteous do in measure understand them and after some manner they obey them, Rom. 7:20-23. When about to enter the heavenly inheritance of the promise itself, their conformity with these will be complete, Heb. 12:14.

Question 2.—*What conclusions might be drawn from the previous observations?*

Answer.—*First*, the reality of the Covenant of Works appears in that it is neither unbecoming of the character of God to give man a law nor to give him a moral constitution that would lead him to obey it, Gen. 1:26. It was equally becoming the glory of man's nature to accept of obedience to it, *cf.* Deut. 30:19. It is not allowable to suppose that in order to a covenant relation between God and His creatures, these should be able to give something of their own which might be esteemed as a meritorious condition of a covenant,

Luke 17:10; nor is it warrantable to maintain that because man in innocence was unable to make such a communication, therefore he was not in that state taken into covenant, Gen. 2:17. In the case of the Covenant of Grace, the merit on account of which man is accepted was displayed in a manifestation of the mercy of God in the obedience and sufferings of Christ, Rom. 10:6, 9. In the case of what is rightly held to have been a covenant between God and Adam as the representative of the human family, the merit for which man was accepted was not his own, but the merit or worth of the Divine character exhibited, in giving him a constitution fitting him for acquiescing in what the Divine law required, and in affording him every facility for glorifying God by yielding obedience to all His commands, Gal. 3:12.

From the constitution of man there is reason to conclude that the representative character and state that are attributed to Adam as a covenant head, and therefore also what is called the Covenant of Works (though in a certain sense a covenant of grace, though not of grace through a mediator), are not inconsistent with the glory of the Divine character, 1 Cor. 15:22. It would not have been inconsistent with the glory of God to have made any one of the human family its representative head, 1 Cor. 15:39. No one of them would have refused to represent their race, Rom. 9:19. And since therefore Adam would not have refused, it is not warrantable, on the assumption that he would have refused, to deny that he was commanded to undertake the duties of a federal head, Rom. 5:12. The interests of men were better provided for on the principle of representation than they would have been, had it been given to every member of the human family individually to undergo a trial, on which would have depended their eternal condition, Ezek. 18:20.

Secondly, 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, Rom. 10:5. The will of God, promulgated as the terms both of a covenant and a law, had the sacredness of a law, Rom. 5:13; acceded to by man, it had all the sanctity of a covenant, Rom. 5:14. At his fall the whole human family became exposed to the curse at once of a broken law and a violated covenant, Rom. 5:18. To the ungodly still it is a law demanding obedience to it, and punishment for past transgression of it as a law, and requiring also not obedience to it as a covenant, but punishment for the breach of it as a covenant, Gal. 3:10. The work of the law is written upon the hearts of men in sin, but not as if it were now a covenant law, but only as the legal demand for punishment, Rom. 2:15. 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. Thus, the impenitent continues under the curse of the law, which if not subdued by Divine grace, he will continue to feel the effects of God's wrath, Rom. 1:18. The law of God addressed to corrupt ecclesiastical or national societies, is not a covenant, but essentially a law, Isa. 24:5, 6.

Thirdly, those who are in covenant with God will, as individuals and communities, in some measure make and keep covenant engagements with Him, Neh. 1:5. Every incorporate community that forms part of the true church of the living God, more or less explicitly, recognizes and endeavors to keep its covenant obligations, Gen. 17:9. From the law of covenanting comes all the consistency of the union of believers, Eph. 3:14, 15. As a covenant society, and in the use of covenanting, it attracts, giving utterance to its intention, and that by professing the truth, that sinners might be won, 2 Cor. 4:13; Ps. 51:13. By taking the covenant of God publicly into their mouth, His people in measure fulfil the Redeemer's mandate, to have the salt of the covenant within themselves, Mark 9:50; together with its corresponding duties of bearing witness to this covenant to others,

Col. 4:6. It is a serious mark of a church's imperfection for it to recognize only implicitly or virtually its covenant obligations, *cf.* Matt. 10:32, 33. The greater the living energy that inhabits the society, the more regard its obligations receive, Ps. 119:6.

Finally, how dreadful is the condition of those who are not in covenant with God, Eph. 4:18. Sinners under condemnation receive outward good here, designed to lead them to repentance, Rom. 2:4. All the good diffused around, comes through the arrangement of a gracious covenant, Eph. 1:22, 23. They receive temporal good themselves indirectly from a covenant on which they will not take hold, Matt. 5:45. The twofold curse of a broken law and covenant pursues sinners, yet they are invited to escape it, Isa. 65:2; but they will not submit, John 5:40. A covenant of peace is made known and its blessings are freely offered, but they cherish their heart enmity toward God and perish in the shadow of redemption, Hos. 14:9.