

## ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting According to the Purposes of God, Part 1)

“[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 is the first revealed purpose of God which calls for the solemn act of covenanting?*

*Answer.*—*First*, there are many things in creation and providence appointed for this, as well as for other ends, that men might make and fulfil solemn vows to God, Ps. 76:7-12. The work of creation itself is cited to lead men to acts of religious homage, Ps. 95:3-7. The work of creation was performed, that on earth a people might be sustained to serve the LORD, Isa. 45:16-18. In anticipation of bestowing goods on His people, even during their continuance on earth, the Surety of sinners, when the creation of all things was decreed, rejoiced, Prov. 8:22, 23, 27-31. Hence of them as heirs of a comprehensive covenant blessing, it is said in language in substance not unfrequently occurring, the meek shall inherit the earth, Ps. 37:11. God’s covenant with every living creature, revealed to Noah, was an appointment to confer means of life on men in order to the attainment of the end of their creation, *cf.* Gen. 1:28 *with* 9:1. Other arrangements, conducive to the same object, are thus described, Job 5:19-24. That the land of Canaan was granted to the Israelites, not merely by promise, but by a sovereign decree, is implied, 2 Chron. 33:8. Israel, fallen from the service of the LORD, is addressed in these terms, Hos. 2:16, 17. Protection, as ordained in connection with their being taken into covenant with God, is thus promised, Hos. 2:18-20. Support, too, as in like manner provided for them—crying unto the LORD for the supply of their wants, is promised, Hos. 2:21, 22. And not merely reclaimed Israel, but the Gentiles, as by sovereign ordination interested in all their outward and spiritual blessings, are objects of the promise, Hos. 2:23.

Question 2.—*What is the second revealed purpose of God which calls for the solemn act of covenanting?*

*Answer.*—*Second*, the covenant of God, as ordained by Him, manifests that the exercise of vowing unto Him was also ordained, Ps. 65:1. In statements regarding the sovereign arrangements of providence is this taught, Ps. 89:3, 5-14. These were brought into view, and their continuance promised, in the covenant made with Noah, Gen. 6:18. In that covenant it was secured that the waters of another flood should not overflow the earth, Gen. 9:11. In that too it was promised, that summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, should not cease, Gen. 8:22. The covenant, therefore, as well as these ordinances, its results, was ordained, and accordingly was ordained, all connected with its dispensations, Isa. 54:9, 10. From the use of the term employed in the prophecy in reference to the waters of the sea, this, moreover, appears, Jer. 5:22. The term rendered *placed* (סִיֵּם, *śim*), in this passage means *appointed*; and in the following passages is applied to the covenant: thus, the statement of the Psalmist declares the institution of His law as a decree, Ps. 78:5. And the demands of the covenant being those of the law, even as His law, the covenant it intimates as ordained, not merely by His high authority, but according to His sovereign will, *cf.* Gen. 2:8. And thus, too, are expounded David’s last

words, as intimating not merely his cleaving to God's covenant, but his recognition of that covenant as according to His good pleasure, in all things decreed, 2 Sam. 23:5.

That covenant was established, Gen. 9:17. In such terms—literally applicable to intelligent and moral beings—but in figure transferable to the lower creation too, God spake of good intended for living creatures of every kind, Gen. 9:15, 16. That all the latter, the lower creation, could apprehend His benevolent purposes, the words cannot intimate, but they do declare that by a beneficent ordination He has made provision for all, *cf.* Matt. 6:26. The beasts of the field, and the fowls of the heaven, in common with man, enjoy the benefits of an animal life, Eccl. 3:18. With man they are subjected to the operation of causes acting according to the sovereign purposes of God, and with man, they are employed by the LORD of all in their varied spheres to fulfil His will, Jer. 15:3. But he, by his great Creator, favored highly above them, is called to obedience in a way to them unknown, Ps. 49:20. Yet not less determinate than the laws and dispositions of the material world are all His arrangements; especially His covenant provisions made with regard to man, Jer. 31:35, 36. The lower creatures of God, though they know Him not, obey His word, Lev. 26:22. Moral agents on earth are subject wholly to His control, Prov. 21:1. The decrees of His providence affect His intelligent and moral creatures not less than those that know not to resolve, Ps. 148:7-12. All things continue according to His ordinances—the material creation and His immortal offspring, 2 Pet. 3:4. His statutes bind the heavens and the earth, Ps. 104:9; and by His appointment, the relations unto Him into which men are brought, are constituted and sustained, Ex. 6:4. Whatever may be the character of a solemn covenant with Him, to His appointment it is due, and by His will continues, Gen. 17:9.

Will not all the holy purposes of God stand, if to them that fear God will be verified the declaration of Scripture, Job 22:28. And was not all that He established—was not the covenant which He established, decreed? 1 Chron. 16:17. His purposes and their fulfilment are alike sure, Prov. 19:21. To some who had disregarded His covenant were directed the words of the prophet, Isa. 28:15, 18. But revealing the Mediator of His covenant, and, consequently, making known that covenant, as to obtain, instead of the covenant with death, which was to be swept away, at the same time, the prophet continues, Isa. 28:16, 17. Regarding both the threatening and the promise, are the prophet's words, Isa. 28:29. And may there not also be applied to both his own averment, or affirmation, Isa. 14:24?

The covenant was commanded when God spake of that omnipotent word by which He commanded all their hosts, at least into existence, Isa. 45:12. And, accordingly, we are to understand the testimony of the Psalmist, as implying not merely that it should endure for ever, but that to His almighty mandate are its origin and continuance due, Ps. 111:9. This the Psalmist celebrates when he sings of the blessing commanded to Zion, Ps. 133:3. And this, too, in addressing the children of Zion, and the God of Zion, he records, Ps. 68:28. In like manner, are the blessings of that covenant thus announced, Deut. 28:8. And is thus declared, that obedience to its requirements was ordained, Ps. 105:8-10. By the LORD of all, obedience to His law is enjoined, Deut. 6:17. But, what is requisite that duty be performed is from Him, Phil. 2:13. And all needful aid He ordained, Heb. 13:21. His law exhibits what He demands, *cf.* Rom. 7:7. The allotments of His providence illustrate the necessity of submission to Him, Mic. 6:8, 9; and the pre-determinations of His will secure the services which He accepts, Tit. 2:14. His laws are perfect, Ps. 19:7. With the arrangements of His providence they harmonize, Amos 9:8, 9. On the absolute

perfection of His nature they are founded, Matt. 5:48. All who obey them declare their approval of His purpose, John 14:15. To encourage such, His purposes are revealed, Deut. 29:29. Because His covenant was commanded, it was made known, Deut. 4:13; Ps. 78:10. Moreover, this covenant shall continue and its benefits will be confessed, and its obligations respected and fulfilled, Ps. 19:8-11. Contemplating its demands as promulgated by the authority of God, these they will endeavor to satisfy in accordance with His sovereign decrees, Eph. 1:5, 9, 11. The wicked disobey His commandments, but cannot alter the determination of His will, Ps. 76:10; Acts 2:23. The others make not the purposes of God the rule of duty, but endeavoring to fulfill His revealed will, they are employed with honor to execute His counsel, Ps. 33:8, 9, 11, 12.

And the covenant of God stands according to a sovereign decree, Ps. 105:8. In virtue of His high authority the LORD imposed the regulations of His material and intelligent kingdoms, and the laws by which His moral creatures are governed, Ps. 135:6. Hence, terms strictly applicable only to the government of the one, are metaphorically applied to the control of the other; and His dispensations to some are employed as symbols of His operations towards the rest, Ps. 49:3, 4. Thus, in language primarily used in reference to the firmness or security of a building, His word, and, consequently, His covenant, are represented as decreed, Ps. 119:152. It is compared to the ordaining or decreeing of the appointments of the material universe, Jer. 33:20, 21, 25, 26. And especially it is true religion through which covenant engagements are made and kept, according to God's decree, such language is used, Job 28:12, 23, 26-28. Were rain and lightening and thunder decreed? no less was it decreed to "fear the LORD;" and, we know, that to vow unto the LORD is to manifest that fear, Deut. 6:13. And hence, also, not less than every other effect of that true wisdom which consists in the fear of the LORD, and of that understanding which is to depart from evil, was ordained the services of vowing and swearing, to Him, Ps. 111:9, 10.