

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting Sanctioned by the Divine Example)

“[P]ublic, social covenanting, is an ordinance of God, obligatory on churches and nations under the New Testament.”—Fourth Term of Communion.

Question 1.—*Why is covenanting sanctioned by the Divine example?*

Answer.—God’s procedure, when imitable, forms a peculiar argument for duty, Lev. 19:2; 20:7. The law of God is His will diffused among His moral subjects, Ps. 40:8. His own example is the direct operation, not of creatures, nor of laws, nor of dispositions, but of the I AM Himself, as the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Spirit, presented to the creatures of His power, for their guidance and direction, Ex. 3:14; Lev. 21:8.

First, God Himself has entered into covenant engagements, Gen. 9:9. The dispensations of God in covenant are peculiar to Himself, Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40. No change whatever is produced on Him when He transacts with His creatures, or on their behalf, Num. 23:19. His relations to them are constituted wholly by His doings that affect them, Mal. 3:6; He Himself is immutable in His being and purposes, Jas. 1:17. When He acts, He is not moved; when He accepts, no transformation of character is produced upon Him; any new relation in which He stands comes wholly from the effect accomplished on the creature, Ps. 103:17, 18.

1st, the eternal Three-in-One entered into confederation in the Covenant of Redemption, Zech. 6:13. Thus, the purpose of God to save sinners is from eternity, Eph. 3:10-12. In an order of nature wonderful to contemplate, the salvific purpose precedes the covenant of grace, Isa. 42:6. God willed that the Father should be the God of grace, 1 Pet. 5:10. God willed that the Son should be the Mediator between God and men, 1 Tim. 2:5. God willed that the Holy Ghost should dispense His influences for carrying into effect the purposes of mercy, John 14:26. These purposes stand from eternity—the fruit of the Divine sovereignty—the conscious resolutions of the eternal—the conditions of a sure covenant, Ps. 89:20-28.

2nd, God entered into covenant with man in innocence, Gen. 2:17. The Divine character was made known to the gifted immortal, Eccl. 7:29. The will of God claiming obedience and the offer of definite good were presented before his mind, Rom. 10:5. He acquiesced, and God was engaged to him and to all his posterity in covenant, Rom. 5:12, 19. One ground on which He was to bestow the blessings of the covenant was His own purpose, Eph. 1:3-5; His making, before His creature, and by and before Himself, a promise to confer it, was, according to the principle of eternal righteousness, the other, Ps. 33:11.

3rd, God enters into covenant with men in Christ, Gal. 3:17; Heb. 13:20; wherein He says to them He is their God, Ex. 20:2. Believers are taken into God’s covenant, Gen. 17:2. He made with His people a covenant that shall endure, 2 Sam. 23:5. All the promises of God are offers made on His part to enter into covenant with sinners, Gal. 3:16. And, therefore, when these are accepted by men, the LORD is to them a God in covenant, Deut. 5:1-3. The LORD hath on some occasions sworn to His people, and by His oath made a covenant with them, Luke 1:72, 73. The LORD brings sinners into the

bond of the covenant, and accordingly makes with them a covenant, Ezek. 20:37. And He keeps, and hence He must have *entered into*, covenant with His people, Deut. 7:9.

4th, the Lord Jesus Christ on earth illustrated in His practice the duty of covenanting, 2 Cor. 1:20. Possessed of the nature of man, and being true God, He covenanted with men, as the Head of the Church of God Himself, and also as a member thereof, Eph. 1:20-23; and as the Father's servant, in covenanting acknowledged Him, Isa. 42:1. He recognized His disciples as His friends and servants; He spake peace to them, and explicitly covenanting with them, making promises, which He gave them grace to receive, John 16:23, 24. Waiting on the ordinances of religion at Jerusalem, He engaged in various exercises of vowing, and especially in the use of the psalms, so full of holy vows to God, Eph. 5:19; Jas. 5:13; and after the last supper with His disciples, He at once sanctioned their use in the worship of God, and gave countenance to the devout making of the covenant engagements which they contain, Matt. 26:26-30. The Psalm which Jesus repeated on the cross, at least in part, Ps. 22:1; is prophetic of His exercises there, and in His intercessory prayer, contain at least one instance of the making or renewing of covenant engagement on His part, not to be forgotten, *cf.* Ps. 22:22 *with* John 17:26.

Second, the LORD, in entering into covenant, provided an example for imitation, Eph. 5:1.

1st, it is possible for His people, after some manner, to imitate God in covenanting, Jer. 34:10, 13, 15, 18. He swears by Himself and they ought to swear for the same reason, even to give assurance to His intention, Heb. 6:17, 18. Because of His hatred to sin, He entered into covenant and they should enter into covenant with Him in order to show their hatred to it, Isa. 56:4, 6. He necessarily loves Himself, and He loves those with whom he covenants, *cf.* 1 Sam. 18:3. They are called by covenanting to accept His promise, that they may have the security afforded by believing His Word, Deut. 8:18. In entering into covenant, God honors His own character, Heb. 6:13. Imitating Him in covenanting all are called, and they ought, to glorify His name, Isa. 65:16.

2nd, it is desirable to imitate God in covenanting, Isa. 55:3. He draws near to His people and should they not draw near unto Him? Jas. 4:7, 8. To take God for an example, is to prosecute the course to boundless happiness and honor, Jer. 12:16. Where He walks, there is sin rebuked, evil flees away, and corruption dies, Deut. 23:14; there good is seen, a field of duty without limit stretches out, happiness immeasurable begins, and glory eternal opens, Ezek. 18:31. It was by His covenant that the scene of heavenly bliss was opened to sinners, and peopled by them, Zech. 13:1.

3rd, it is a duty to imitate God in covenanting, Isa. 45:23. The act of swearing by the name of God is holy, Deut. 6:13. The performance of it is inculcated in the Decalogue, Ex. 20:7. Swearing on the part of the Most High is a manifestation of His holiness, Amos 6:8. Swearing on the part of men is at once an imitating of Him, and a holy service, Jer. 4:2. When men endeavor to discharge the duties of the Ten Commandments, they are exercised to holiness, and acting in imitation of Him who only is holy, 1 Sam. 2:2. Even as the exercise of keeping the Sabbath is enforced by the Divine example, so is that of entering into covenant with God, Ex. 20:11. There is a general exercise unequivocally inculcated by the Divine example, Lev. 11:44. Likewise, this same duty is emphatically taught by the apostle, Heb. 10:23. For it is incumbent upon the believer to imitate the Redeemer generally in all things which are imitable, John 12:26. In particular, to follow Him in regarding all the ordinances of religion—unfolding a covenant relation to God;—in acknowledging a heavenly Father, as a child in covenant alone could do;—and in making

a solemn confession of the truth of God, saying with Him, though in circumstances infinitely humbler, this is the end and cause for which I was born, John 18:37. His people, were He bid them, would follow Him to prison and death and they will surely follow Him in confessing His own Divine character to the glory of the Father, Phil. 2:11.

In conclusion, *first*, it is important to follow this Divine example of covenanting for it gives a peculiar elevation to the mind, 1 Chron. 16:15. We are called to duty for the advancement of God's glory, and for our own advantage, Ps. 103:2. Was it not for His own glory that God revealed Himself as a God in covenant? Jer. 14:21. Was it not that He might make known what inherently belonged to Him, and even the manifestation of which could not add to His essential greatness? 1 Chron. 29:11. Was it not that He might teach His creatures gifted by His bounty while in the enjoyment of good to rise above themselves, so as to give scope to the manifestation of excellence, lovely because of itself, and not less lovely because of its tendency to attract others to be transformed into the unfading image of its own loveliness? Rom. 9:4. How then ought all to be drawn by imitating God in this, to the manifestation of the excellence of the truth, that sinners may behold it, and being enabled to lay hold upon it, may drink of that fountain of delight to which it may lead, and which to eternity, though drawn upon each of the redeemed, will remain alike unfailing and satisfying to all? Isa. 61:8.

Finally, to follow the example of God in covenanting, is obligatory through life, and in all ages, Prov. 7:1-3. The LORD swore in order to give men an assurance of the immutability of His purposes of mercy, Heb. 6:13, 17, 18. And in order that men may arrive at the assurance of hope, they ought to have recourse to the use of this, as well as every other means of grace, Ps. 25:10. It is self-evident, that every time that the people of God take hold on His covenant, He, after some manner, makes a covenant with them, Jer. 11:2, 3, 6, 8, 10.