

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting Enforced by the Grant of Covenant Signs and Seals 3)

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

Question 1.—*What is the fifth sign to be considered which the LORD bestowed?*

Answer.—As a sign of God’s covenant, we are called to contemplate the priesthood, for a people in covenant with God, and a nation of priests are one, Ex. 19:5, 6. At a period long posterior to the days of Moses, and in reference to Gospel times, the same character is applied, Isa. 61:6. The apostle Peter, addressing the people of Israel scattered throughout sundry regions, also describes them thus, 1 Pet. 2:5, 9. And to this description given by the apostle, primarily of the dispersion, but not limited to them, corresponds to that by another apostle of himself and all who believe, in their grateful adoration, Rev. 1:5, 6.

In order to commemorate the deliverance which God wrought for Israel when he slew the first-born of Egypt, for a sign He claimed, as consecrated to Himself, all the first-born of their males, Ex. 13:12, 16. The first-born of their sons represented the whole nation as a holy priesthood, *cf.* Num. 3:12, 13, 41, 45. Princes and heads of families, whether fathers or eldest sons—succeeding to their fathers’ privileges—had performed the duties of priests, *cf.* Ex. 18:12. Sonship implies priesthood, Heb. 5:5, 6; and priesthood denotes the sacrificial character which faithful sonship must exhibit, *cf.* Gen. 22:2, 7-9, 16; John 3:16; Rom. 12:1. Such a character, therefore, the first-born in Israel would have come to sustain, Num. 8:18; Ps. 89:26, 27. When religious services should have been performed by them, the whole people, as a nation of priests, would have worshipped, 1 Chron. 23:13; 2 Chron. 29:21, 24. And of whatever they were the token, the people at large, accordingly, were also the sign, *cf.* Jer. 31:9. But instead of them, subsequently the tribe of Levi was taken, and the special duties of the priesthood were confined to Aaron and his sons, Ex. 28:1; Deut. 21:5. Hence that appointed priesthood, and the Levites their attendants, conducted public services instead of, and for the whole nation, a kingdom of priests, Num. 18:1-6. And as the first-born of Israel were a sign of a great deliverance wrought for them because of His covenant, *cf.* Ex. 12:29, 30; the people themselves, the ordained priesthood among them were, and all the people of God will continue to be, a covenant sign, Isa. 66:21.

In some respects, all the ordinances of religion are a covenant sign, and it is set apart to wait on these that the holy priesthood displays a like character, thus, to them, in all their extent, are applicable the words of the LORD concerning Phinehas, Num. 25:12. As lights in the world, and as a devoted people, they have verified to themselves the promise to teach and offer sacrifice, Deut. 33:10; and being faithful in discharging their solemn obligations, and thus illustrating the duty of paying the vow, their conduct, in vowing and fulfilling their engagements, receives the approval of covenant keepers, Deut. 33:9; so, encouragement from above is vouchsafed to them in their peculiar character, in the words of prayer by which seek both blessing and assurance of preservation, Deut. 33:11.

God’s covenant with His people is the covenant of a priesthood, Num. 25:13. And to secure the dispensation of the means of grace, that was given, Jer. 33:18, 22. The

ministry of reconciliation and the church at large are co-ordinate, *cf.* 2 Cor. 5:18, 19. Where the one is promised, the other also will be bestowed in due time, Isa. 52:7. Where the ministers of the word are, there, to a greater or lesser extent, will be a church, Eph. 4:11-13. And a church will seek to itself the ministering servants of Christ, 1 Cor. 16:15. Where the ordinances of religion are properly dispensed, there is a church, Acts 2:42, 46, 47; and there an appointed instrumentality, in greater or less measure, presents the mind of Christ, 1 Cor. 2:16. When His servants dispense the ordinances of His grace, God speaks to His people, 1 Cor. 2:4; 1 Thess. 2:13. And as a people in covenant with Him, to His words they are called to assent, *cf.* 1 Tim. 6:3, 4. His servants are ambassadors for Christ, Eph. 6:20. As though God did beseech by them, they beseech sinners to be reconciled unto Him, 2 Cor. 5:20. Like the church itself in the world, the continuance of the ambassadors of Christ shows that God is waiting to be gracious, Isa. 30:18. They who despise their messages declare themselves His enemies, *cf.* Gal. 4:16. Like the recall of an envoy, which betokens approaching hostilities, the removal of the servants of Christ from among a people, declares that the LORD is about to deal with them as His foes, *cf.* Isa. 57:1; 2 Kings 22:20. When churches become corrupt, this is the case, Rev. 2:5. When the righteous are removed from among them, and the ecclesiastical constitution is in opposition to His will, the whole body is out of covenant, and what was the temple of God becomes the receptacle of idols, *cf.* Hos. 4:16, 17. When the LORD was angry with His professed people, He suffered a lying spirit to enter the mouth of His prophets, 1 Kings 22:22, 23. And to the people as a whole, in token of their rejection, He will take away their priesthood, Hos. 4:6. But notwithstanding the defections of many such, the LORD will raise Him up a faithful priesthood, it is expressed in anticipation that the priesthood shall continue, Ps. 102:28; even pledging in promise to the end of the world, Matt. 28:20. Hence, the encouragement to give pastors to feed His people, Jer. 3:15; with duties defined to be ambassadors of divine truth, Mal. 2:7.

Those faithful to the covenant of the priesthood are approved, while the desecrators thereof are fearfully condemned, as encouraged in the approbation of the prophet, Mal. 2:4-6. And how cheering the promise, in its ultimate spiritual reference not less applicable to the whole spiritual priesthood than it was primarily to the sons of Aaron, Ezek. 44:15. But denounced are the others thus challenged for their unfaithfulness, Mal. 2:8. An apostate priesthood taught the people to swear at once by the LORD, and by Malcham—the abomination of the Sidonians—a false god, Zeph. 1:5. To cut off these, and the victims of their deceit, the LORD stretched out His hand, Zeph. 1:4. And to mark the care with which He watched over the faithful dispensation of His own ordinances, and observed every deviation from them, as designed to present the privileges and duties of His covenant, were also uttered His words, Mal. 1:14.

A priesthood was recognized when God entered into covenant with Noah, and with Abraham, Gen. 8:20, 21; 12:8; and throughout all time was a priesthood to be approved as a covenant sign, *cf.* Deut. 31:9. Had it not been for the everlasting covenant, the rite of sacrifice had not been instituted, and a priesthood had not been, Lev. 24:8, 9. But that the ratification of that covenant by the glorious Surety might first be prefigured, and next had in commemoration, was given this sign, Jer. 33:21. To intimate the ratification of God's covenant with His people, as at Horeb, the blood of the sacrifice by the priesthood was sometimes sprinkled, Ex. 24:5, 6, 8; and, consequently, the priesthood, under the law, kept up the remembrance of the covenant, and pointed forward to its final confirmation, Jer. 33:11. The later priesthood, the people of God under the Gospel, in offerings of

praise, record that one sacrifice by which it was rendered sure, and hence they, as well as all else of the holy priesthood, to its special duties of vowing and swearing, from their peculiar character, became engaged, Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10.

Although of those who ministered at the altar under the former dispensation, it is said the priests were made without oath, Heb. 7:21; we are not to suppose them as not set apart by covenant to the duties of the Levitical priesthood, *cf.* Neh. 13:29; nor are we to suppose that the people of God, as a holy priesthood in general, whom those priests represented, do not sustain their character in virtue of covenant arrangements, *cf.* Neh. 9:38. Those priests, on believing, were entitled to the blessings promised and secured by the oath of God to Abraham's seed, and so were the rest of His covenant people, Gal. 3:6, 7, 14, 16. Moreover, the LORD swore to His people at Horeb, when, in addition to the moral law, He enjoined all those other laws, among which stand the statutes regarding the priesthood of Aaron, *cf.* Ex. 19:5, 6; 28:1. To His people then present, whether priests or not, and to His people who should descend from them, throughout the period over which the covenant there made should extend, His oath was given, *cf.* Ex. 19:22; and seeing it was then given, when His people individually acceded to His covenant, or His faithful servants to the duties of the sanctuary, it was not repeated, *cf.* Deut. 5:2, 3. It is only when a new promise was made, or an enlargement or an illustration of one formerly made was given, or when, for His covenant's sake, He denounced wrath on His enemies, that the LORD swore to His people, *cf.* Gen. 24:7, Ex. 34:10; Num. 32:10. It is in contrast with Christ, the great High Priest of our profession, that those priests are introduced by the apostle, as made without an oath, Heb. 7:21. To the covenant of the Levitical priesthood, the LORD did not append a new and separate oath, *cf.* Deut. 10:8. The nation of Israel before, by the oath of God, had been set apart as a nation of kings and priests, *cf.* Ex. 24:7. And when that priesthood was appointed, they merely entered on the enjoyment of privileges formerly promised, and came under renewed obligation to perform appointed duties, Ps. 103:17, 18. But in addition to the oath of God to His Son from eternity, upon the occasion of His taking upon Him—in the nature of God-man, the office of His priesthood, in order to show its speciality His oath was also given, Ps. 89:34-36. There was not the same regard to be paid to the type that belonged to the antitype,—to the priesthood under the law that was due to the priesthood of Christ, Heb. 7:11, 12. The priests under the law were not appointed to their office as if they had been principals, it was reserved for Christ to be so appointed, Heb. 7:15. Perfection was not by the Levitical priesthood, for those priests were made so after a carnal commandment and were pledged to those duties by covenant engagement, in contrast to Christ, Heb. 7:16. Christ, in order to perform the high functions of His priesthood, was also in solemn covenant voluntarily engaged, *cf.* Isa. 6:8; but that testimony might be borne to the dignity of His character and perfection of His work, by the oath of God again given, He was made priest, not merely as priest, but as the Surety and Mediator of the new covenant, Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:22. To none of the priesthood under the law, did the title of Mediator pertain, Heb. 8:6.

And through Christ come all the distinguishing features, and all the high privileges of His people, as an holy priesthood, 2 Cor. 1:20. To secure blessings spiritual and eternal to the people of God, the LORD swore to His Son, Heb. 7:28. In what was promised to Him by the oath of God, His people—a nation of kings and priests, are interested, Ps. 72:17. He is a King; His people sit down with Him on His throne, Eph. 2:6. He is a Priest; His people desire to fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in their flesh, for His body's sake, which is the church, Col. 1:24; and while they neither possess nor claim

merit on account of their deeds, rejoice inasmuch as they are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, they may be glad also with exceeding joy, 1 Pet. 4:13. And by and through the oath by which He was constituted priest, His people were in general set apart to their functions,—to covenant, to pray, to praise, to present spiritual sacrifices to God, acceptable through Himself, Eph. 1:6. Because of the priesthood of Christ, the priesthood under the law was instituted, Heb. 9:23-26. Because of the priesthood of Christ, through which was to be ratified God's covenant, His people—a holy priesthood, to act as vowers, or Covenanters, were appointed, *cf.* Isa. 64:6-10. Their existence, while they claim an interest in its blessings, and resolve and endeavor to perform its duties, testifies to its character and design, and displays how vast was the glory and blessedness that lay couched in the oath of the Father to His incarnate Son, *cf.* Ps. 25:14.