

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 7.-Of God's Covenant with Man.

I. The distance between God and the Creature is so great, that although reasonable Creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their Blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on Gods part, which he hath been pleased to expresse by way of Covenant.¹

Question 1.—*Is the distance between God and the creature great?*

Answer.—Yes. It is great as to wisdom, power and righteousness, Isa. 40:13-17. There exists no relational point of contact by nature (*i.e.*, God and the creature are totally and absolutely distinct as to nature), Job 9:32, 33. Morally, there exists a great chasm between the righteous demands of God and the compliance of the creature, 1 Sam. 2:25.

Question 2.—*Although reasonable creatures owe obedience to their Creator, are they able to experience any blessedness or reward apart from the voluntary condescension of God?*

Answer.—No. In order for the Lord even to behold the things of earth, he must voluntarily condescend to look upon it, Ps. 113:5, 6. Therefore, it is with this knowledge, of the infinite superiority of God, that men must approach him, Ps. 100:2, 3. There is nothing in a man that can profit God, Job 22:2, 3; 35:7, 8. Even when men have done everything commanded, they have only performed that which was due to God as their Creator, Luke 17:10; Acts 17:24, 25. There is, then, no blessing or reward due unto any man except God condescend, of his own free mercy, to bestow such upon the sons of men, 1 Cor. 4:7.

Question 3.—*In what way has God expressed himself, so as to display his voluntary condescension in bestowing blessings and rewards?*

Answer.—By way of Covenant, God has all along exercised his providence towards men, in order to make them happier and render their obedience more cheerful, Ps. 25:14.

Question 4.—*What is meant by the term "Covenant?"*

Answer.—The Hebrew word for "Covenant," בְּרִית, *berith*, denotes an establishment in general, and hence we read of God's covenant with day and night, Jer. 33:25. It is more consistent with the nature of that language to view this word not as a derivative of *bara*, בָּרָא, that is, to *create*, but rather of, בָּרָה, *barah*, that is, to *elect*, for in a covenant there also is a selection, or commissioning, of persons and conditions. It was customary to dedicate and confirm such a covenant with various ceremonies, to which also belonged the slaughter of animals. These animals would be hewn in half, and the pieces would be placed opposite each other. The covenanting parties would then walk between the pieces, thereby testifying, "Thus must I be hewn in pieces if I break this covenant." This is to be observed in Genesis 15:9, 10 and also Jeremiah 34:18, 20 where we read, "And I will give the men that have transgressed My covenant . . . which they had made before Me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof." This is why

¹ Isa. 40:13-17; Job 9:32, 33; 1 Sam. 2:25; Ps. 113:5, 6; Ps. 100:2, 3; Job 22:2, 3; Job 35:7, 8; Luke 17:10; Acts 17:24, 25.

the act of covenanting in Hebrew is called, כָּרַת בְּרִית, *karat berith*, (cf. Ps. 50:5), and in Latin *percutere foedus*, that is, *to cut a covenant*. It was also customary to eat a meal in conjunction with the act of covenanting (cf. Gen. 31:44-46). For this purpose, salt was used, which is pure and stable and keeps food from spoiling. This may possibly be the reason why a sure and desirable covenant is called *a covenant of salt* in 2 Chronicles 13:5.

The Greek refers to a covenant as, διαθήκη, *diatheke*. The Septuagint (LXX) uses that word to translate *berith*. In the New Testament, it is either translated as *covenant* or as *testament*. There is no basis for—and it is contrary to the Greek writers, the Septuagint, and several texts in the New Testament—insisting that *diatheke* is not to be translated as covenant, but solely as testament. In a subtle manner, this undermines the covenant transaction with God and the exercise of faith.

The difference, among others, between a testament and a covenant is that in the making of a testament there is no permission needed from the heir, whereas mutual acquiescence of both parties is a necessary prerequisite to a covenant. *Diatheke* is most certainly very suitable to describe the covenant of grace, for it is a covenant which has the element of a testament in it, and it is a testament which has something of a covenant in it. *It is a covenantal testament, and a testamental covenant.*

In our language “covenant” is derived from the verb “to bind,” whereby things which previously were not connected, are joined together and united. In a covenant, parties which previously were not one but existed separately, are bound together and thus united. The Greek, *diatheke*, also signifies an establishment, particularly one by agreement or testament, Heb. 7:22; 9:15.—A real covenant in general is, an agreement made between different persons on certain terms. Its necessary requisites are parties, a condition, a promise, and a penalty, if any of its parties be fallible. The covenants which God has contracted for promoting the eternal happiness of mankind are two—of works, and of grace, Gal. 4:24; Rom. 3:27; Gal. 2:21; 5:4; Rom. 6:14; 8:2; Phil. 3:9.