

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

Renovation of Covenants.

(Part 3.)

“That public, social covenanting, is an ordinance of God, obligatory on churches and nations under the New Testament; that the National Covenant and the Solemn League are an exemplification of this divine institution; and that these Deeds are of continued obligation upon the moral person; and in consistency with this—that the Renovation of these Covenants at Auchensaugh, 1712, was agreeable to the word of God.”—Fourth Term of Communion.

Question 1.—*May the covenant universally be imposed upon all ranks and sorts of persons? May all be admitted to take it?*

Answer.—Though all members of covenanting societies are under the obligation of it *materially*, and all are bound to take it *formally*, if they are qualified; yet neither ought it to be imposed, nor should any be admitted without respect to their capacities both gracious and legal. This appears from the following considerations: 1.) The wicked, those that are scandalous and obstinate in wickedness, error, profanity or malignancy, those who hate instruction, and cast the Lord’s word behind them, do not have God’s right to it, Ps. 50:16,17. 2.) Likewise, those who are legally incapacitated, as enemies of truth and godliness, with whom God’s people ought not associate, Ex. 23:32; 34:15; Deut. 7:2; Judg. 2:2; Ezra 4:3; 9:14.

Additionally, it is clear from Scripture though all are bound to it, it is to be imposed upon and tendered to none but those that subscribe to it with choice and resolution, Jos. 24:15, 22. It should be tendered to none but such as are reformed from the defections and compliances of the times, Neh. 10:28. As well, we see that it was tendered to none but those who had knowledge and understanding of the sins and duties contained in the covenant. Again, it is tendered to none but such as can swear and subscribe it according to the qualifications of an oath, Jer. 4:2.

Question 2.—*Can anything loose the obligation of a lawful oath?*

Answer.—No. Ps. 15:4. No man’s temporal loss or prejudice will make an oath null, or loose from the obligation of it. Nor though the oath engages to something in its own nature indifferent, Num. 30:2; for an oath, even things which were indifferent prior to the taking of the oath binds our souls. Nor can the extortion of it by fear or violence, if the matter is lawful; nor the deceit and guile of others, if the deceit is only circumstantial, as in the oath to the Gibeonites, Jos. 9:3-13. Nor sinful rashness in the manner, if lawful in the matter, Jos. 9:14, 15. Nor any good meaning or intention in reversing the oath, 2 Sam. 21:2. Nor though the oath be conceived by creatures (that is, when it is sworn to the creature rather than the Creator), Matt. 23:20, 22. Nor when the things becomes impossible, if that impossibility could have been foreseen or prevented. Nor when the

condition is unlawful, if already fulfilled, Gen. 38:16, 17. Nor another meaning devised afterwards, not according to the imposer's mind, nor our own at first who took it, Ps. 24:4.

Oaths have no force: 1.) When the thing sworn is sinful and unlawful in itself, Acts 23:21. 2.) Or unlawful to him that swears, Mark 6:22, 26. 3.) Or simply impossible, Matt. 5:36. 4.) Or when the thing sworn to is not in our power, Num. 30:5, 14. 5.) Or when the deceit in it is not in the circumstantial, but in the essentials, Matt. 19:9. 6.) Or when it hinders a greater good, Mark 7:11-13. 7.) Or when the case materially alters, Matt. 26:15. 8.) Or when the party sworn to relaxes us, John 5:8-11.

Question 3.—*What better are we for the making and keeping of such covenants?*

Answer.—By such means, we are established a people unto God, and He promises to be unto such a God, as He has said and sworn, which comprehends all advantages imaginable, Deut. 29:13.

Question 4.—*Is the obligation of national covenants, where the matter is lawful, perpetual and binding upon posterity?*

Answer.—If any engagements can be supposed binding to posterity, certainly national covenants to keep the commandments of God, and adhere to His institutions, must be of that nature. It is not to be denied that several obligations do bind posterity: 1.) Public promises with annexation of curses to breakers, make the posterity obnoxious, as well as those who personally came under the engagement, Neh. 5:12, 13. Thus, did that promise of the Jewish nobles and rulers bring their posterity under the curse, if they had exacted usury of their brethren. So, too, did Joshua's adjuration oblige all posterity never to build Jericho, Jos. 6:26; and the breach of it did bring the curse upon Hiel the Bethelite, in the days of Ahab, 1 Kings 16:34. 2.) Public vows do bind posterity. Jacob's vow, Gen. 28:20; did oblige all posterity, virtually comprehended in him, Hos. 12:4. The Rechabites found themselves obliged to observe the vow of their fore-father Jonadab, Jer. 35:6, 14. 3.) Public oaths do oblige posterity. Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel to carry up his bones to Canaan, Gen. 50:25; which did oblige the posterity some hundreds of years after, Ex. 13:19; Jos. 24:32. 4.) National covenants with men before God do oblige posterity. Such was Israel's covenant with the Gibeonites, Jos. 9:15, 19; for the breach whereof, many years later, the posterity was plagued, 2 Sam. 21:1. So Zedekiah's covenant with Nebuchadnezzar, Ezek. 17:18, 19. Especially, national covenants with God before men, about things moral, which are objectively obliging, are perpetual, Jer. 50:5. And yet more are they perpetual and binding when they are of a hereditary nature—when the subject is permanent, the matter moral, the end good, and in the form of them is a clause expressing their perpetuity.