

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Part 2.)

“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.”—Fourth Term of Communion.

Question 1.—*What is the principle upon which the continuous or descending obligation of covenants is founded?*

Answer.—It is founded in the right which parents have to represent their posterity in certain social transactions, Ex. 13:19. It is supposed in the continued identity of society throughout successive generations, Deut. 5:2-4. And it naturally enough follows from the common interest which children have, along with their parents, in those objects for which federal deeds are framed, Rom. 5:12. In this case, representation springs, not from choice, as when men appoint their civil and ecclesiastical functionaries, but from the appointment of God, from a divinely authorized constitution—a constitution the existence of which is distinctly recognized in the case of Levi, Heb. 7:9, 10.

Question 2.—*What is the reason of this continuous obligation of covenants?*

Answer.—The reason may be ascertained from: 1.) God will have it so, Ps. 76:11. 2.) The permanency of the subject coming under the obligation. The church and nation are corporations existing and perpetuated in succession of generations, Eccl. 1:4; the succeeding coming into the obligations of the preceding, Ps. 103:17, 18; and God as a party to such deeds always exists, Ps. 102:12. 3.) The sameness of the relation to the moral Governor of the universe. The corporation and all its members are related to God as moral subjects to a rightful sovereign, Isa. 33:22. The duties being moral to which the covenant binds, by virtue of the moral relations of the corporate society to the Divine Sovereign in its successive generations, it is bound by the deed, Ps. 145:4. 4.) Obedience to God, according to his law, is a debt which no one generation can fully pay, and remains to each successive generation the same—hence the covenant obligation must be continuous, Deut. 5:9, 10; Mal. 2:10. 5.) Covenanting is a means of holiness—each successive generation needs to be sanctified, and consequently each successively needs this instrumentality—hence covenant obligation is transmitted with the stream of succeeding generations, Deut. 8:18-20.

Question 3.—*Is not the principle of the transmissible nature of the obligation of public social covenants founded in reason and equity?*

Answer.—Yes. When the matter of a covenant is lawful, and the parties continue to exist, the covenant itself retains its obligation until the object it contemplates has been gained, Rom. 7:2. Thus a covenant between God and the church, or God and a nation, continues obligatory long after the original framers of it may be gathered to their fathers,

Ex. 19:5, 6. The object contemplated may be a degree of Reformation hitherto unattained. The parties, too, must be held as continuing to exist, God the one party being the eternal God, and the church, or the nation, the other party, continuing in virtue of that identity which a corporate body possesses. This identity is not affected by the constant changes a society may undergo as regards individual members.

Question 4.—*Is not this principle of the continuous transmissible obligation of covenants highly advantageous in its tendency?*

Answer.—Yes. This appears: 1.) It strengthens that sense of gratitude to God by which men are stimulated to obedience, by leading the children to reflect on his goodness, in having regard to their welfare in the covenant made with their fathers, and comprehending them in the same federal transaction. Of this, Peter reminds the Jews, Acts 3:25. 2.) It inspires confidence in the promised mercies of God, and affords ground to hope that he who has been gracious, in times that are past, to the fathers, will be gracious still to their children. Thus Moses encouraged the people of Israel, Deut. 4:31. 3.) It furnishes a powerful argument in pleading with God at a throne of grace, as we find exemplified and confirmed in Jeremiah's expostulation with God concerning the state of his nation, Jer. 14:21. 4.) It throws a shield over a people by which the wrath of God is averted, Lev. 26:44, 45. 5.) It is not less fitted to keep up a remembrance of the wonderful things done by God on behalf of a people, by forming a record of them, and furnishing a medium for their transmission from generation to generation, 1 Chron. 16:12-16. 6.) Above all, it is eminently fitted, by begetting a delightful mutual interest between fathers and children, to promote and display the unity of the church. The fathers, being required to transact for the children, and the children, by being required to recognize the deeds of the fathers, must be inspired with a double and most salutary interest in each other. All selfish and exclusive feeling is in this way rebuked. The present generation are taught to look back to the past, as the past are supposed to have looked forward to the future. Distant periods are united, and the interests of different generations concentrated, John 17:11; Deut. 5:2, 3.

Question 5.—*Is covenanting a stated and ordinary, or occasional and extraordinary duty?*

Answer.—It is occasional and extraordinary.

Question 6.—*What are some of the times and seasons in which the church, or a nation, is called on to engage in this extraordinary yet important duty?*

Answer.—Such times and seasons are many and various. 1.) Times of public humiliation for apostasy from God, Jer. 50:4, 5. 2.) Times of affliction, Neh. 9:1, 38; 2 Chron. 34:29-32. 3.) Times of public reformation, 2 Kings 23:1-3. 4.) Times of public thanksgiving for special deliverances, 2 Kings 11:17-20; Ps. 76:11. 5.) When there is great lukewarmness and a tendency to backsliding, Deut. 29:10-15. 6.) In view of severe conflict with the enemies of the truth, to consolidate and strengthen the Lord's host. For example, Israel before crossing the Jordan, Ps. 44:3; Heb. 11:32-35. So our fathers, and those fighting against the combined "armies of the aliens," Rev. 19:11. 7.) Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, Isa. 44:3-5. 8.) When jealousies and

contentions prevail, and there is a tendency to schism, covenanting will be a happy mode of “binding up the testimony”—which is in danger of being rent by schism, Amos 3:3; Heb. 6:16.