

An Historical Defense Of Covenanting And The Solemn League And Covenant #2

Isaiah 8:20
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We continue in our study of national covenanting and the Solemn League and Covenant having now embarked upon an historical application of the moral principles we have found in Holy Scripture. In part one of our historical defense, we considered the historical circumstances leading up to, surrounding and following the Solemn League and Covenant. In part two of our historical defense of the Solemn League and Covenant, we shall briefly consider the document itself and the morality of the provisions found in it. For a covenant that is not good, righteous and moral cannot be lawful, no matter how sincere the people may be who take it. An immoral covenant is no binding covenant at all. But how do we determine whether the Solemn League and Covenant (or any other covenant for that matter) is good, righteous and moral? There must be an infallible standard or ruler by which we can measure it in order that we may know and be confident that the doctrine and principles taught in the Solemn League and Covenant are good, righteous and moral.

Let us turn briefly to Isaiah 8:20. Here we find the alone infallible standard for our faith and practice. If this National Covenant does not measure up to Scripture, it is because there is no light in it.

First, Isaiah writes to a religious people who have fallen away from the faith they once professed. The doctrines and commandments of God have been left behind for worship and instruction that is of man's invention. Thus, Isaiah speaks God's word to the people of Israel, "Bind up the testimony, seal the law my disciples" (Isaiah 8:16). There is a sense in which prophecies may be said to be sealed when they are preserved and await fulfillment at God's appointed time in the future (as in Daniel 12:4). But here, Isaiah does not command that prophecy be sealed but rather that God's testimony be bound up and God's law sealed. God's testimony most

likely refers to God's wonderful acts in history and God's law most likely refers to God's doctrine and precepts. To bind up and to seal both refer to acts of holding fast and preserving that which is revealed (whether in the Book of History or in the Book of Revelation). When God reveals His truth to us in history and in Scripture, we are not to let it slip from our firm grasp, but rather to bind it to ourselves and seal it that it not be lost, diluted or compromised.

Second, note that Isaiah makes it clear that when we do (as Christ's disciples) bind up His testimony and seal His law that we will be mocked, ridiculed, looked at as weird and strange ("Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of host, which dwelleth in mount Zion" Isaiah 8:18). Although Isaiah spoke of faithful disciples as being spiritual children whom the Lord had given to him, this ultimately points to all those given by God to Christ that He should save, forgive, justify, nourish and cherish as His own (Hebrews 2:13). Isaiah is here a type of Christ. But just as the faithful disciples of Isaiah (who were a few compared to the many who were backsliding in Judah and Israel) were appointed by God to be signs and wonders among the vast majority in Israel, so are the faithful disciples of Christ today appointed by God to be signs and wonders among the vast majority of those in the Church at the present time (Psalm 71:7; 1 Corinthians 11:18-19). Yes, refusing to be moved from those biblical truths found in our Solemn League and Covenant will make us a "sign" and "wonder" to most within the Church today, but it is God Himself who makes us such a "sign" and "wonder".

Third, Isaiah warns his faithful disciples that some in Israel will come to them and tell them to look elsewhere for answers to matters of faith and practice ("And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto wizards, that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God?" Isaiah 8:19). In Isaiah's day, it was to necromancers that many were turning for answers—that is, to those who said they communicated with the dead to get their answers. However,

dear ones, even if it is not to the dead that we go for our answers, if we go to the living and not to God and to His testimony and law as our infallible rule for faith and practice, we might as well be seeking our answers from the dead. Ancient teachers and divines may be helpful, ancient counsels and creeds may be useful, but it is always “to the law and the testimony” that we are to rest in unshakeable trust and confidence (according to Isaiah 8:20). For if the dead or the living speak not according to this infallible rule of faith and practice, “there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). When we ground our supreme trust and confidence for what we believe and practice in people (living or dead), in antiquity, in the majority, in sincerity or any other created thing, we will be misled, deceived and deluded. Here is an exhortation to always ask, “What do the Scriptures teach about this doctrine or practice?” Here alone is our confidence: “To the law and the testimony.”

And so we bring the Solemn League and Covenant to the same rule: “To the law and the testimony.” Let us briefly examine the Solemn League and Covenant bringing it to the law and the testimony of God.

The parts of which the Solemn League and Covenant is comprised are: (I) The Preface; (II) The Six Articles; (III) The Conclusion.

I. The Preface.

A. The Preface contains a brief historical account of who were the parties to this covenant. One party consisted of Church and State, and all classes of people in the kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland as one moral person mutually bound together. The other party to this covenant was the most High God to whom they lifted up their hands and swore this covenant. Since some have questioned whether the original covenanters viewed God as one of the parties in this covenant, we will have more to say about this in the next lecture. It is certainly good, righteous and moral for Nations, Churches, and people to swear a National Covenant to God,

and not only for Israel to do so, but for Gentile Nations to do so as well (Isaiah 19:18-25).

B. The Preface also contains some historical circumstances leading up to the Solemn League and Covenant and the stated ends of this covenant: the glory of God, the advancement and preservation of Christ's kingdom and religion, and the security of civil liberty and peace. These are indeed biblical ends.

II. The Six Articles.

A. Article One.

1. Here is stated the moral principle that we are bound to preserve the Reformed Religion where it is already established (as it was in Scotland at that time), and to carry forward and advance the same reformation where it does not yet exist or is not yet completed (as it was in England and Ireland at that time). Are these not biblical principles (Philippians 3:16; Revelation 3:3; Titus 1:5; Matthew 6:9-10)?

2. There is an assumption in the Solemn League and Covenant that the Reformed Religion is biblical Christianity and that it alone must be preserved and advanced, for we cannot morally preserve and advance any false religion or anything that is contrary to what God has revealed in His Word (Exodus 20: 3).

B. Article Two.

1. In the second article, we vow to God to endeavor in our own lives and in our various callings and places of influence to uproot all unbiblical doctrine, worship, discipline and Church government. Note that schisms and sects within the National Church are likewise to be rooted out. The Solemn League and Covenant does not promote denominationalism, it uproots it. For denominationalism promotes schism and division within the Church. Therefore, one cannot consistently uphold the moral principles of the Solemn League and Covenant while yet upholding denominationalism by supporting or visiting Churches that

allow an open communion or that allow members to visit other Churches. Occasional hearing in visiting various denominational Churches is not uprooting schism and denominationalism, but rather promoting it. All matters pertaining to sound religion are to be advanced, and all matters destructive to or contrary to sound religion are to be purged and rooted out (Matthew 28:19,29; Deuteronomy 12:30-32; Revelation 2:14-15).

2. That which was subsequently written by the Westminster Assembly to promote biblical doctrine, worship, discipline and Church government were the following documents: The Westminster Confession of Faith, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms (all promoting biblical doctrine); The Directory For The Public Worship Of God (promoting biblical worship); and The Form Of Presbyterial Church Government (promoting biblical discipline and Church Government).

C. Article Three.

1. In this article, we promise to God to preserve the rights and privileges of the civil authorities, as they promote the true Reformed Religion and preserve and defend the lawful civil liberties of their people.

2. Here is warranted a lawful submission to the civil magistrate who is “the minister of God to thee for good” (Roman 13:4). However, to those civil magistrates or to that civil government that establishes an immoral constitution and refuses to amend it or that blatantly, obstinately and persistently rules against the Law of God (as found in the Ten Commandments), such a civil ruler, civil government or civil constitution (as is true within the United States and Canada for example) is not the minister to thee for good but is rather a minister to thee for evil because it has taken the place of God over that nation and made itself the national God and religion. In such cases, we are not bound to acknowledge such rulers to be God’s ministers to us for God (in fact, we are bound to testify against them and not to recognize them by taking an oath to uphold or defend them or their godless constitution—either an oath we take ourselves or an oath we take vicariously when we voted for a any representative in an election). Because the Federal Constitution states that it (rather than God’s Law) is the supreme law of the land, there can be no

sound moral basis by which such a civil government rules. The Solemn League and Covenant does not call for revolutionary violence by individuals against an immoral civil government, but it does call those in covenanted lands not to own as lawful that government that will not kiss the Son (Psalm 2).

D. Article Four.

1. In this article, we solemnly swear to God that we will endeavor to bring all those in Church and State to appropriate censure and punishment who wickedly hinder this covenanted reformation in Church and State. This is also a biblical moral principle (Deuteronomy 13:6-11; 1 Corinthians 5:7).

2. Where the Church or State will not censure or punish covenant-breakers, we must at least pray for such reformation, testify such covenant-braking and instruct others in the way of truth.

E. Article Five.

1. In the fifth article, we own before God that we will not only preserve and promote this covenanted reformation in religion and government to ourselves and those living at the present time as those who are bound by this covenant, but we will also preserve and promote this covenanted reformation in religion and government to ALL our posterity who are likewise bound by this Solemn League and Covenant. It is not only those living that are bound by lawful National Covenants, but also their posterity (whether national, ecclesiastical or familial). This is also a biblical principle which we have noted from previous sermons (Deuteronomy 29:10-15; Joshua 9 compared with 2 Samuel 21:1).

2. We will spend a significant amount of time in future lectures seeking to show from historical documents that the American colonies and Canada were also the national posterity in view when this covenant was sworn.

F. Article Six.

1. In this last article, we acknowledge that we are bound to help and to defend fellow covenanters who stand for these truths against the scorn, ridicule and attacks brought against the covenanted reformation (which also infers that we will testify against those who attack covenanters who are standing for the truth. We also promise to God that we ourselves will not give way either to indifference or defection from our stated profession in this cause of a covenanted reformation (Matthew 12:25; Galatians 6:2). We promise to profess and to endeavor to live (always dependent upon the grace of God) according to biblical attainments of our covenanted forefathers.

2. Dear ones, we stand together, and we fall together. We battle, and we are attacked together. For we stand united in covenant with our God to pray for and promote this glorious covenanted reformation which Christ will ultimately bring to pass (Isaiah 19).

III. The Conclusion.

A. Here the covenant is concluded with a confession of sin, and acknowledge of God's grace, and an appeal to God as searcher of our hearts that we will seek by His grace to own and fulfill the moral duties found in this Solemn League and Covenant (1 Chronicles 28:9). None of these duties are meritorious before God as a ground for our justification. They are, however, scriptural duties that we are bound to obey and that we promise (by God's grace) to fulfill.

B. There is blessing promised for faithfulness and judgment threatened for unfaithfulness: "that the Lord may turn away his wrath and heavy indignation, and establish these churches and kingdoms in truth and peace." Are not the many denominations within this land, the unsound doctrine, worship and Church government, the wicked civil leaders and abominable laws that exist within this land due to God fulfilling the judgment he threatened for obstinate disobedience to His covenant? It is yet our prayer and certain hope that we shall reap the blessings of truth and peace within our Nation and within one National Church when God mercifully remembers His covenant with us in the future and pours forth

His Spirit upon us so that we as a nation might take up in love and faithfulness our Solemn League and Covenant to the most High God.

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"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto" (Galatians 3:15).