

## ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting Confers Obligation, Part 2)

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

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Question 1.—*How does social covenanting confer obligation and in what way is it different from personal covenanting?*

*Answer.*—Social covenanting entails obligation on the covenanting society, even throughout its existence, until the end of the covenant be attained, Gen. 50:24, 25.

*First*, because such covenants are made, not merely in the name of the individuals who enter into them, but also in the name of posterity, Jer. 11:10. On recorded occasions of warranted covenanting, such was the manner of entering into the engagements made, Deut. 29:14, 15. However, it may be necessary to add the explanation, that, by those who are represented as not present, we are to understand the descendants of the congregation of Israel, since the reference to the duties then performed by the assembled people speaks of them, Deut. 30:19. Hence, whatever, in consequence of entering into such federal engagements, is incumbent on those who make them, is binding on their successors, Jer. 32:39; and since a covenant transaction binds the parties to the making of it, it therefore binds all those, though not present, whom these parties represent, and for whom it is made, Deut. 5:2, 3. Whatever reason the transaction affords for binding the former, it supplies for holding the latter bound, Gen. 17:7. The engagement made by and for the living covenanters, is not less explicit than that thereby made by them for those who shall succeed to their privileges and duties, and the latter, no less than the former, are brought under its obligation, Ex. 19:5-8. The federal compact could not be made without constituting an obligation, nor could it be entered into without conferring that obligation on all the parties represented at its formation, Deut. 29:10-15.

*Second*, the church is one in all ages, Song 6:9. Her glorious Head is one, Eph. 4:15. All her true members are spiritually united to Him, Eph. 4:16; and they are united to one another in love, Col. 2:2. The church consists not in a limited number of those who at any time fear God, but of all of them, Acts 2:47. As one body enduring from generation to generation by her Lord, she is spoken of, and is recognized by her members—a truth seen in the commission given to Jeremiah, Jer. 2:2, 3, 20; and confirmed by the Psalmist who taught the church to sing, long after her deliverance from Egypt, in the first person, Ps. 66:6. Moreover, the church, posterior to the advent of Christ, is represented as the house in which Moses served, but which Christ had built, and over which, as well in the days of the patriarchs as in the last times, He ruled as a Son, Heb. 3:2, 6. It is to the church, as existing in all times, that unquestionably belongs the apostolic description, Eph. 5:25-27. Since the church, then, is a body, her standing is independent of the individual members who may be in her communion, *cf.* Isa. 62:3, 12 *with* 1 Cor. 5:1; as a responsible agent, even as an individual, she may come under obligation and fulfil it, Isa. 54:5; and through every age of her existence, be held bound to duty by her engagements, Ps. 56:12. The same principle which is applicable to the church as a whole, behooves to be contemplated by every section of her in given circumstances, Acts 15:23; 2 Cor. 11:2.

*Third*, because of the church's social character, wherein members enjoy privileges, not merely in their individual, but also their social capacity, so they also are both called to duty, Rev. 2:5. The actions of an individual are not those of any society to which he may belong, except he act for them, and according to their appointment, 1 Tim. 5:22. But the deeds of a society are those of every member thereof, who does not disapprove of them, Rev. 2:20; of every one who, because of these deeds, does not leave the communion, Rev. 18:4. The engagements of society are understood to be acceded to by every member of it existing when these are made, and of every one who may become connected with it before they are fulfilled, Ex. 12:48. Everyone who joins a society is understood by his act of joining it, to approve of its organization, to accept its privileges, and become engaged to its duties, Num. 9:14. It would be impossible for society to continue, were obligation to cease so soon as the individuals who may have come under it should leave it, by death, or otherwise, Num. 36:7. Were the duties of social bodies to cease in this manner, it might be held that these communities should be re-constructed on the death of every individual member of them, and also on the accession of each one who might be connected with them, Ruth 1:14, 16.

Every individual capable of making a choice, who, by receiving the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, becomes connected with the church, engages to accept its privileges, and to perform its duties, Ezek. 44:9. All that is incumbent on each member of the church, then, devolves on each of her members, Ex. 12:2-7. The obligations that bind the church, may have been conferred ages before, Ezek. 45:21; but when a person makes his profession, even then, by his own act, they descend upon him, Gen. 34:22-24. Before making his solemn acknowledgement, he was under obligation to become connected with the church, and the evils that are threatened against those who are far from God hung over him, Eph. 2:11, 12. By entering the communion of the church, he becomes an integral part of her society, and whatever advantage or responsibility attaches to membership within her, is extended to him, Eph. 2:13.

The children of church members, are members of the church, and are therefore under obligation, Gen. 17:10. Because of their relation to their parents, children are in possession of the peculiar privileges of the families to which they belong, Ps. 115:14, 15; and to perform the duties of these, they are under obligation, Gen. 17:11-14.

*Fourth*, because social covenanting, approved in Scripture, conferred descending obligation, Acts 3:25, 26. So, Abimelech required Abraham to enter into a covenant with him, which the patriarch would keep, by not dealing falsely with himself, nor with his son, nor with his son's son, which when ratified by oath bound all those specified in the covenant, Gen. 21:23. By oath, the children of Israel made with Joseph a covenant, by which their descendants in fulfilling it, acknowledged themselves as engaged to carry up his bones from Egypt, Ex. 13:19. The covenant made by Joshua and the princes of the congregation of Israel with the Gibeonites, was kept by the descendants of both parties, until there was a breach of it by Saul, upon which followed tokens of Divine displeasure, *cf.* Josh. 9:15 *with* 2 Sam. 21:1, 2.

*Fifth*, because the ends of such covenants may not be attained during the existence on earth of those who entered into them, Acts 7:15, 16. Nothing is more common in the providence of God, than for one to begin, and another to finish, John 2:20. The work which God gives countenance to some to undertake, according to His own good pleasure, He commits to others, Josh. 1:1, 2. Schemes of reformation set on foot by His servants, He acknowledges and, when He will, they are enabled to complete them, otherwise they

are wound up by others, Ps. 48:12, 13. To resolve to use means to bring the church to a state of excellence, to which, according to the promise of God, she will yet come on earth, is obligatory on them who fear Him, Isa. 8:16. To vow to use those means, they are under obligation, Ps. 76:11. Their removal from this work does not manifest their LORD's displeasure at them, but His intention to bestow upon them a gracious reward, Rev. 14:13. It falls to others to undertake that work unfulfilled, John 4:38.

*Sixth*, because the people of God even themselves are bound by anterior engagements of His church, Jer. 50:5. Thus, in the land of Moab, Moses addresses many regarding a covenant obligation engaged before their birth, Deut. 5:2, 3. Additionally, several Scriptures have the saints acknowledging themselves as included in the covenant made with Abraham, and consequently under its obligations, Ps. 47:9; Isa. 63:16; Luke 1:72-74; Gal. 3:7. By a prophet of the LORD, Israel are exhibited as recognizing themselves to have been represented in the covenant transactions of Bethel, Hos. 12:4. Likewise, the words of Peter make this interest clear, Acts 2:39. It is expressing this same sentiment, that their fathers had entered into covenant engagements with God, in which they were recognized, of which Moses and all Israel sing, Ex. 15:2. And the Psalmist offers praise in language acknowledging explicitly the obligation to obedience that had been transmitted by the deeds of parents or ancestors to God's service, Ps. 116:16-18.

*Finally*, because the LORD Himself always views His church as bound by the covenant engagements thereof, competent to its circumstances, made in all earlier periods, Deut. 4:23; Rom. 9:4. By the covenant which He made with His servant Abraham, and once and again renewed to Him, He held His people bound, Eph. 2:12. Thus, in the ratification of His covenant with Abraham there was a lamp of fire, an emblem of God's covenant presence, and a smoking furnace, symbolizing the trial of the people of Israel in the iron furnace of Egyptian affliction, Deut. 4:20; for although the people were not yet born, they were present in Abraham, Gen. 15:8-12, 17, 18. That covenant the LORD kept with the whole house of Israel, even as if they had all of them been then present, Neh. 9:7, 8. And the duties of the covenant, as if all Israel had been before Him when it was made, He enjoined on them, Gen. 17:9. Moreover, He commands all to keep His covenant as made, not merely with His people at any given period, but as entered into by the faithful who went before them, Ps. 111:9. It is manifest that a covenant with God should be kept by those who make it and the duty of covenanting ought not merely be performed throughout every age but, until all the engagements of the people of God, made in every period, be implemented, they confer obligation on their successors, 1 Chron. 16:15. God is angry with, and threatens those who keep not the covenants of those who represented them, as if they had broken a covenant with Him by themselves, Jer. 11:10, 11.