

## Covenant and Politics

Many years ago, a retired minister, in describing the state of affairs existing among many of the young people of his and many other denominations, remarked, "What is needed is the rekindling of interest in the doctrine of the covenant of grace. Our precious youths must be made aware of what it means to be children of the covenant." And what was true then is even more so now.

In our age of extreme individualism and subjectivism, a proper understanding and appreciation of the covenant of grace is vital for Christian living. The Church is not just a collection of separate saved Individuals. The individual finds his place within the family of God. Christians are part of the Body. They are related to the whole of the community. Their needs and functions must be related to those of the other members of the Body. We approach God as members of His Body and have our place in history as members of His people (1 Cor.12).

The Bible reveals God as a covenant-making, covenant-restoring, covenant fulfilling God. From the time of God's dealings with Abraham (Gen. 17:2) to the giving of the cup of the covenant by Jesus to His disciples in the Upper Room (Matt: 26:22ff.), we find that God establishes His people in covenant relationship with Himself. The covenant is God's gracious Initiative. God is willing to be known as "our God." And the demand and promise is that we should be "His people." And God expects us to live as members of His covenant. This is expressed in the covenant rule, "As He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Pet. 1:15). This means that in our dealing with one another, in our families, in our social life, institutions as well as politics, we must express something of the character of our holy covenant God. Our allegiance to God has practical Implications.

John Calvin (1509-64) developed his political thinking on the basis of God's covenant with His people. Calvin insisted that the citizens of Geneva should join together in a political covenant to uphold the city's government and ecclesiastical ordinances. He viewed political government as a divine human covenantal relationship. Even if they do not recognize it, rulers and people exist as a state by virtue of their mutual covenant obligation in the sight of God, to deal with each other in justice, equity and righteousness. He taught that the magistrates are the living law to whom the people are to give just honour and obedience, and in return the magistrates must then carefully obey the law. Our modern secular state is far removed from Calvin's covenantal view.

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