

**The Festival of Maundy Thursday 2010**

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*Concordia Lutheran Mission*

Terrebonne, Oregon

## **“When God Makes a Testament, It Means God Would Become Man and as a Man Would Die for the Sins of Men in order to Bequeath them Eternal Life through the Gospel.”**

“This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”

**St. Luke 22:20**

### **Introduction**

What does that word testament mean? A testament is a promise made by someone that is effected when that person dies. The testament only has force if the death of the testator has occurred.

What, then, does it mean that God makes a testament? Obviously, for God to make a testament means that God will die. But God cannot die because He's God. God is not subject to death because He is God. So, how could God make a testament? Indeed, God cannot die; but when God becomes man, then God can die. God in and of Himself cannot die, but when God becomes man as He did in Jesus Christ, then He can and in fact did die.<sup>1</sup> And because God has become man and can die, He can make a testament.

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<sup>1</sup>*“We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. By this I mean: If it were not to be said [if these things were not true], God has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if ‘God’s death’ and ‘God died’ lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. But indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: ‘God died,’ ‘God’s passion,’ ‘God’s blood,’ ‘God’s death.’ For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.” The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*<sup>44</sup>, underscore added.

And where there is a testament, there must be something given, a bequest. So, what's God's bequest? God's bequest is the remission of sins.<sup>2</sup> Hence, Jesus pours out the remission of sins through the Sacrament of Holy Communion instituted this night.

And through the remission of sins bequeathed to us in the Sacrament Christ also bequeaths to us life eternal. For where there is remission of sins, there is life eternal and salvation.

## **I. When God Makes a Testament, it Means God would Become Man in order to Die as a Man for the Sins of the World in Order to Bequeath Men the Remission of Sins and Life Eternal.**

### **A. When God speaks of His Testament, God is telling us that He will become man and die.**

What does that word "testament" actually mean? We hear it all the time, Old Testament, New Testament, last will and testament. So, what does testament mean? A testament is a promise to give someone something upon their death. St. Paul writes:

For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.<sup>3</sup>

Only when the one who makes the testament, the testator, dies, is the inheritance given. St. Paul writes:

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Luther writes: "A testament, as everyone knows, is a promise made by one about to die, in which he designates his bequest and appoints his heirs. A testament, therefore, involves first, the death of the testator, and second, the promise of an inheritance and the naming of the heir. Thus Paul discusses at length the nature of a testament in Rom. 4, Ga. 3 and 4, and Heb. 9. We see the same thing clearly also in these words of Christ. Christ testifies concerning his death when he says: 'This is my body, which is given, this is my blood, which is poured out' [Luke 22:19-20]. He names and designates the bequest when he says 'for the forgiveness of sins' [Matt. 26:28]. But he appoints the heirs when he says 'For you [Luke 22:19-20; I Cor. 11:24] and for many' [Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24], that is, for those who accept and believe the promise of the testator. For here it is faith that makes men heirs, as we shall see." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>Hebrew 9:16.

<sup>4</sup>Hebrews 9:15.

Christ, then, speaks of His own death because in tonight's Gospel He speaks of His testament<sup>5</sup>:

This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.<sup>6</sup>

But how can Christ die when He in fact is God? In the first place, Scripture makes it clear that Christ is God in the flesh. St. John the Apostle, for example, writes:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Christ cannot die insofar as He is God because God simply cannot die. But now that God has become man in Christ He can die. The Lutheran Church confesses:

*We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. By this I mean: If it were not to be said [if these things were not true], God has died for us, but only a man, we would*

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<sup>5</sup>A last will and testament is a grave matter. And the Lord's Supper is all the more grave because these words are the last will and testament of the Son of God. Martin Chemnitz, the "second Martin" of the Reformation, writes: "Therefore, first and foremost in this whole argument, we must set forth and impress on hearts and minds by constant consideration the true, clear, and compelling reasons, affecting not only the ears and minds but also including dangers to conscience, in regard to the words of the Supper. They are the words of the last will and testament of the very Son of God and not a game or place for exercising the mind by dreaming up unending interpretations that depart from the simplicity and proper meaning of the words. The mind should treat and consider these words with neither temerity nor frivolity but with reverence and piety and in great fear of the Lord." *The Lord's Supper*, p. 26.

"Chemnitz, Martin, Lutheran theologian. B. 1522 ... He took the leading part in getting out the Formula of Concord, and the Catalog of Testimonies, which is appended to the Symbolical Books, is essentially his work.... Together with Selnecker and Kirchner, Chemnitz, in 1582, published an Apology of the Book of Concord. ... The most learned theologian of his time was mourned by the whole Lutheran Church; his importance is seen in the Catholic saying that if Chemnitz had not come, Luther had not stood." *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, pp. 127, 128, s.v. **Chemnitz, Martin**. "If the Second Martin had not come, the first would not have prevailed. – 17<sup>th</sup> Century Adage." *The Second Martin: The Life and Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, The Rev. Dr. J. A. O. Preus, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, back cover.

<sup>6</sup>**St. Luke 22:20.**

<sup>7</sup>**St. John 1:1, 14.**

*be lost. But if “God’s death” and “God died” lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. But indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: “God died,” “God’s passion,” “God’s blood,” “God’s death.” For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.*<sup>8</sup>

When God says He makes a testament, then God is saying He will become man and will die because a testament is peculiar to man. Luther writes:

You see, therefore, that what we call the mass is a promise of the forgiveness of sins made to us by God, and such a promise as has been confirmed by the death of the Son of God. For the only differences between a promise and a testament is that the testament involves the death of the one who makes it. A testator is a promiser who is about to die, while a promiser (if I may put it thus) is a testator who is not about to die. This testament of Christ is foreshadowed in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; indeed, whatever value those ancient promises possessed was altogether derived from this new promise that was to come in Christ. Hence the words ‘compact,’ ‘covenant,’ and ‘testament of the Lord’ occur so frequently in the Scriptures. These words signified that God would one day die. ‘For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity occur’ (Heb. 9[:16]). Now God made a testament, therefore, it was necessary that he should die. But God could not die unless he became man. Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, “testament.”<sup>9</sup>

## **B. New Testament is the remission of sins.**

What, then, is the New Testament? The New Testament is the remission of sins. The prophet Jeremiah writes:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*<sup>44</sup>, underscore added.

<sup>9</sup>*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36: 38, underscore added.

<sup>10</sup>**Jeremiah 31:31.**

Here, again, in these words, the Lord's death is indicated. For when the Lord says, "I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel," He actually says, "I will cut a new covenant<sup>11</sup> with the House of Israel, and the House of Judah." The Lord says "cut a covenant" because this covenant cut and cost the Lord His own flesh, causing Him to bleed<sup>12</sup>, to shed His Blood, to suffer, and die because He was bearing the guilt of our sins.

Jeremiah continues:

for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin nor more.<sup>13</sup>

The forgiveness of sins came at the price of the death of God's Son. For the wages of sin is death.<sup>14</sup> And so God became man in order that He might die in the place of sinful men and receive the wages of sin man had earned and, thereby, spare man death. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

One man had sinned, one man should pay, but there was a total lack of capability to do so. God was able to pay, but He didn't owe it; that's why God became man, so that then the payment would be credited to man, since the debt was incurred by man and at the same time was fully paid because the payment was derived from God.<sup>15</sup>

The New Testament, then, is the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ-crucified.

## II. God Bequeaths Life Eternal through the Gospel.

### A. The heirs of Christ's Testament are Christians.

And where there is a testament, there must be heirs to receive the bequest. Jesus says:

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<sup>11</sup>"*cut, or make a covenant* (because of the cutting up and the distribution of the flesh of the victim for eating in the sacrifice of the covenants ...)" Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Brigs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 503, s.v. "**b'rith**" 4.

<sup>12</sup>**Acts 20:28**: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Underscore added.

<sup>13</sup>**Jeremiah 31:34**

<sup>14</sup>**Romans 6:23.**

<sup>15</sup>*Seven Christmas Sermons*, p. 37.

This cup *is* the New Testament in my blood which is shed for you.<sup>16</sup>

The heirs are Christians. For Christians receive by faith the remission of sins Christ offers. Luther writes:

A testament, as everyone knows, is a promise made by one about to die, in which he designates his bequest and appoints his heirs. A testament, therefore, involves first, the death of the testator, and second, the promise of an inheritance and the naming of the heir. Thus Paul discusses at length the nature of a testament in Rom. 4, Ga. 3 and 4, and Heb. 9. We see the same thing clearly also in these words of Christ. Christ testifies concerning his death when he says: ‘This is my body, which is given, this is my blood, which is poured out’ [Luke 22:19-20]. He names and designates the bequest when he says ‘for the forgiveness of sins’ [Matt. 26:28]. But he appoints the heirs when he says ‘For you [Luke 22:19-20; I Cor. 11:24] and for many’ [Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24], that is, for those who accept and believe the promise of the testator. For here it is faith that makes men heirs ... .<sup>17</sup>

The Lutheran Church states:

Wherefore the Mass is to be used to this end, that there the Sacrament [Communion] may be administered to them that have need of consolation; as Ambrose<sup>18</sup> says: *Because I always sin, I am always bound to take the medicine.* [Therefore this Sacrament requires faith, and is used in vain without faith.]<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>**St. Luke 20:19.**

<sup>17</sup>*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup>“Ambrose. Noted leader and teacher of the Western Church; b. Treves, 340; d. Milan, 397. Educated in Rome for a legal career; appointed consular prefect for Upper Italy; took up his residence in Milan about 370. After death of Bishop Auxentius a dispute between the orthodox and Arian parties caused a severe quarrel which threatened the peace of the city. Ambrose, as magistrate, was present to maintain order, when the people, suddenly, turning to him as a new candidate, transferred him from his official position to the episcopate. Since he was still a catechumen, his baptism took place at once, and eight days later, in 374, he was consecrated bishop. Ambrose was distinguished for his defense of the orthodox faith and for his firm stand in all matters revealed in Scripture, opposing both paganism and heresy with equal zeal. He did not hesitate to rebuke even the emperor when he permitted himself to become guilty of a massacre. As a teacher of the Church, Ambrose was concerned more with the practical and ethical side of Christianity than with the scientifically theological; among his works are *De Officiis Ministrorum* (Of the Offices of Christian Ministers), *De Virginiis* (Of Virgins), and others.

The inheritance for Christians is the remission of sins won by Christ through His Passion on the Cross of Calvary.

**B. Christ bequeaths Christians their inheritance of the remission of sins through the Word and the Sacraments.**

And Christians receive their inheritance through the Lord's Supper. For Jesus says the remission of sins, which is the New Testament, comes through the Holy Communion. Jesus says:

This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.<sup>20</sup>

In catechism we learned:

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? It is not the eating and drinking indeed that does them, but the words here written, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins"; which words, besides the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.<sup>21</sup>

And also through the Word and Holy Baptism we receive the remission of our sins. St. John the Apostle writes of the remission of sins coming through the Word:

And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, through Holy Baptism we receive the remission of our sins. St. Peter says:

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Toward the end of his life he exhibited a stronger tendency toward asceticism ..., for he emphasized the supposed value of celibacy, of voluntary poverty, and of the martyr's death. He did much for the reform and development of church music, not only in hymns, but also in the liturgy which is associated with his name. See Ambrosian Chant." *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 16, s.v. "**Ambrose**".

<sup>19</sup>*The Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV: Of the Mass.*33, Triglotta, p. 67.

<sup>20</sup>**St. Luke 20:19.**

<sup>21</sup>*The Small Catechism*, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup>**St. John 20:22-23.**

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.<sup>23</sup>

Luther writes of Holy Baptism:

[H]oly baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which was shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ. For we do not attain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. But he takes this forgiveness of sin and tucks it into baptism.<sup>24</sup>

Christians, therefore, receive their inheritance of the remission of sins through Christ's own Word and Sacraments. The Lutheran Church confesses:

The Sacraments are signs of God's will toward us, and not merely signs of men among each other; and they are right in defining that Sacraments in the New Testament are signs of grace. And because in a sacrament there are two things, a sign and the Word, the Word, in the New Testament, is the promise of grace added. The promise of the New Testament is the promise of the remission of sins, as the text, Luke 22, 19 says: *This is My body, which is given for you. This cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*<sup>25</sup>

### **C. Christ bequeaths life eternal through the remission of sins by the Word and the Sacraments.**

And because Christ bequeaths to Christians the remission of sins through the Word and the Sacraments, He also bequeaths to them life everlasting. For if the wages of sins is death, then the remission of sin means life eternal. St. Paul writes:

For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>**Acts 2:38.**

<sup>24</sup>*Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325, underscore added.

<sup>25</sup>*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII): Of the Mass.*60, Triglotta, p. 409.

<sup>26</sup>**Romans 6:23**



In catechism we learned:

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking? That is shown us by these words, “Given and shed for you for the remission of sins; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the Holy Communion Christ bequeaths to us the benefits of His Passion: the remission of sins.

And where Christ bequeaths to us the remission of sins, there He also bequeaths to us life eternal and all the riches and glories of His eternal Kingdom.

*Amen.*

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<sup>27</sup>*The Small Catechism*, p. 21.