



Holy Week.

"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.'" **Martin Luther**, *Luther's Works*, Vol. Vol. 36: 38, underscore added.

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**“That God Made a Testament Means God would become
Man and Die; and God Bequeaths to Men the
Remission of Sins and Life Everlasting
through the Gospel of Christ-Crucified.”**

“For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.”

Hebrews 9:16

Introduction

What does it mean that God makes a testament?¹ That God makes a testament means that God would die. For, as St. Paul writes, where there is a testament, there must also be the death of the testator.

But how could the immortal God die? The immortal God cannot die, but the fact that God makes a testament tells us necessarily that God would become man because only men die.²

¹“Now I have cited these statements not because I have wanted to borrow ideas from the orators or the lawyers as the assurance of our faith in this most serious controversy, but because Scripture itself applies this argument drawn from the testaments of men to the last will and testament of God Himself. Therefore if the words in the last will and testament of a man are to be observed and weighed with such great diligence, care, and sense of duty lest the will of the testator be negated and lest something be done against or alongside the will of the testator, then the reader should consider what must be done in the case of that will which belongs to the Son of God, our Savior, which He established on the night in which He was betrayed. He did so with earnest gestures, words, and emotions which pertained to the greatest of all legacies – our salvation. To the improper discernment of this legacy, Paul pronounces, there is attached the guilt of judgment. This argument contains a great warning for us.” The Rev. Dr. Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord’s Supper (De coena Domini)*, tr. the Rev. Dr. J. A. O. Preus, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979, p. 86.

²“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

For this reason, Luther writes, “Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, ‘testament.’”³

And where there is a last will and testament, there must be an inheritance. God, therefore, bequeaths to men in His will the remission of sins.⁴ And by bequeathing to men the remission of sins, Christ also bequeaths to them all the blessings of heaven, including the life everlasting and the resurrection of the body.

I. That God Makes a Testament Means that God would become Man and Die for the Sins of the World.

A. That God makes a testament means God would become man and die.

Christ’s Words are profound:

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.⁵

Now a testament means that the person must die. St. Paul writes:

For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.⁶

*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.**⁴⁴, underscore added.*

³Luther’s Works, Vol. 36: 38, underscore added.

⁴“And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” **St. Matthew 26:27-28.**

⁵**St. Matthew 26:28.**

⁶**Hebrews 9:16.** “**will.** ... **2.** A document by which a person directs his or her estate to be distributed upon death Also termed *testament; will and testament*” *Black’s Law Dictionary*, Eight Edition, ed. Bryan A. Garner, St. Paul, MN: Thomson-West, p. 1628, s.v. “**will**”.

Christ is God. How can God die? Well, God cannot die insofar as He is God, but now that God has become man God can and indeed does die.⁷ 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, Gal. 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.

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 difference 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

⁷“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.*⁴⁴, underscore added.

comprehended most concisely in this one word, “testament.”⁸

The fact that God makes a testament means that God will become man and God will die.

B. God’s Testament underpins all the promises of God.

And, as Luther has noted, this Testament of God’s has underpinned all the promises of God throughout the ages:

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]).⁹

St. Paul, for example, writes of the Mosaic covenant:

For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This *is* the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.¹⁰

Now, St. Paul uses the word “testament”¹¹. St. Paul uses the word “testament” when Moses writes, “blood of the covenant”? Why does St. Paul write “testament” when Moses writes “blood of the covenant”? St. Paul writes “testament” because “blood of the covenant” means testament.

For what does a covenant, i.e. an agreement, sprinkled with blood mean? The shedding of blood over an agreement is remarkable. That ought to grab anyone’s attention; this agreement or relationship or covenant is serious. Blood is involved in this agreement or relationship God makes with the people of Israel. What does that mean? It’s obvious. It means this agreement or covenant is held together by the shedding of someone’s blood. That’s serious business. The shedding of blood means someone must die. Hence, someone must die for the agreement to be

⁸*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38, underscore added.

⁹*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38.

¹⁰**Exodus 24:8.**

¹¹In Greek, “diatheke”, pronounced “dee-a-thay-kay”.

in effect. Christ's Testament, the Shedding of His Blood for the sins of Israel, then, underpinned the relationship between God and the people of Israel.

For this reason, one of the expressions for making a covenant in the Old Testament is "carath [to cut] berith [a covenant]" because in the cutting of flesh, blood was shed. For example, when God promised Abraham the land for his people to him, Moses writes, "In the same day the LORD [cut] Abraham [a covenant]"¹². Once again, this covenant or relationship, was underpinned by the Blood of Jesus Christ, by His Testament.

And this Shedding of the Blood of the Messiah precedes Abraham and, indeed, goes back to the Garden of Eden. For the relationship the world has enjoyed with God since the fall of Adam, namely, that the world continues to turn, the sun rises and sets, planting and harvesting proceed without interruption, is underpinned and held together by the Blood of the Seed of the Woman. Moses writes:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.¹³

The Seed of the Woman is wounded, for the devil bruises His heel. Christ was wounded because His Blood was in fact shed on the Cross. Christ suffered death for the sins of the world and rose again on the Third Day. Hence, we see that Blood of Christ, His Testament, underpinned the relationship with Adam and Eve and, indeed, underpins God's relationship with the entire world to this day. Luther writes:

This first comfort [**Genesis 3:15**], this source of all mercy and

¹²**Genesis 15:18.** The gravity of the Blood of the Messiah underpinning this covenant is borne out by the previous verses. "And he said unto him, Take me a heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece on against another: But the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land *that is* not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces." **Genesis 15:9-17.**

¹³**Genesis 3:15.**

fountainhead of all promises, our first parents and their descendants learned with the utmost care.¹⁴

God's Testament, then, underpins, governs, and regulates God's relationship with all men to this very day and has done so down through the ages since the fall of Adam.

C. God died for the sins of the world.

And as we've seen from the Old Testament relationships of God with men, God died for the sins of the world. For it was the shedding of the Blood of the Son of God that underpinned God's desire and ability to work with people and to keep this globe turning. In other words, God could only work with people on the basis of God's Testament, the Shed Blood of His Son. Hence, because the Atonement for sin established and governed the relationships between God and men and even keeps this world turning, God, then, became man and died for the sins of all men, for the world.

II. God Bequeaths to Men the Forgiveness of Sins and the Life Everlasting.

A. God bequeaths to men the remission of sins and life everlasting.

And where there is a testament, there must also be a bequest. St. Paul the Apostle 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.¹⁵

And what does God bequeath to men in His Testament? He bequeaths to them the remission of sins. St. Matthew the Apostle writes:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.¹⁶

Because sin meant death to men, the remission of sins means life. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

¹⁴*Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, p. 191, amplification added.

¹⁵**Hebrews 9:15.**

¹⁶**St. Matthew 26:26-28.**

For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

Because God bequeaths to men the remission of sins in His Testament, He at the same time is bequeathing to men life eternal and all the treasures and glories of the Kingdom of Heaven.

C. Scripture frequently speaks of God’s blessings as inheritance because all of God’s blessings are the bequest of God’s Testament.

And because God bequeaths these blessings through His Testament, the blessings God bestows upon men are frequently throughout Scripture called an inheritance. Moses writes:

Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance.¹⁹

In the **Psalms** we read:

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked *shall not be*: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it *shall not be*. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. ... For the LORD knoweth the ways of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. ... The wicked

¹⁷**Romans 6:23.**

¹⁸*The Small Catechism*, p. 21.

¹⁹**Deuteronomy 4:21.**

borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For *such as be* blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and *they that be* cursed of him shall be cut off. ... For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved forever; but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever. ... Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land²⁰

In **Proverbs** Christ says:

I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.²¹

Here Christ teaches us that through His *Passive Obedience*²², i.e. through His obeying God even unto the death of the Cross, He causes men to inherit treasures. There again is God's Testament and God bequeathing to men blessings through His Testament.

In the New Testament Christ says:

Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. ... And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.²³ ... Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world²⁴

St. Peter the Apostle writes:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and

²⁰**Psalm 37:7-13, 18, 21-22, 28-29, 34**, underscore added.

²¹**Proverbs 8:20-21.**

²²“As my *Priest*, Christ *fulfilled the Law* in my stead perfectly (active obedience), *sacrificed Himself* for me (passive obedience), and still *intercedes* (pleads) for me with His heavenly Father.” *The Small Catechism*, question 132 B, p. 108.

²³**St. Matthew 19:29.**

²⁴**St. Matthew 25:34.**

that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you²⁵

St. Paul the Apostle writes:

And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.²⁶ ... The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints....²⁷

And, finally, St. Paul the Apostle writes in today's epistle:

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.²⁸

And not only are men heirs through God's Testament, but also God Himself. For God receives back to Himself His beloved creation through the bequest of God's Testament. God the Father says to Christ in **Psalm 2**:

Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession.²⁹

All blessings from God, both temporal and eternal, are the bequest of God to men through His Testament.

Conclusion

That God made a Testament means God would become man and die. For only men make testaments and only men bring a testament into effect through their death.

God became a man and died for the sins of the world. Thus God bequeaths to men

²⁵**I Peter 1:4.**

²⁶**Galatians 3:17-18.**

²⁷**Ephesians 1:18.**

²⁸**Hebrews 9:15.**

²⁹**Psalm 2:8.**

through His Testament the remission of sins.

And because God bequeaths the remission of sins, He also bequeaths to men all the blessings and riches of God's glorious and eternal Kingdom, including life eternal and the resurrection of the body.

Amen.