

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 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 comprehended most concisely in this one word, ‘testament.’” **Martin Luther**, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38, underscore added.



Albrecht DURER

Large Passion -- CRUCIFIXION

The Festival of Maundy Thursday
5 April 2012
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

Comment [LDP1]:

Comment [LDP2R1]:

Comment [LDP3R2]:

“The Sacrament of Holy Communion is God's Last Will and Testament wherein He Bequeaths to Men Absolution and Life Eternal.”

“This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”

I Corinthians 11:25

Introduction

What does testament mean? A testament is the last will of a man that takes place upon his death to bequeath to his heirs his worldly possessions.¹

What, then, does it mean when God makes a last will and testament? In the first place, it means God has become man because only men make last will and testaments. Secondly, it means God would die, because a testament is in force upon the death of the testator.² Finally, God bequeaths something to men. God bequeaths absolution of all sin because this is the New Testament³ and, therefore, life eternal to men. For sin induces death. The absolution of that sin means life eternal and the resurrection of the body.⁴

¹“For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament *is* of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” **Hebrews 9:16-17**.

²“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. 36, p. 38, underscore added.

³“But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” **Jeremiah 31:33-34**, underscore added.

God, then, in His Last Will and Testament bequeaths to men absolution of all sin, saving faith, life everlasting, and the resurrection of the body.⁵

I. God's Testament Means God becomes Man and Dies for the Sins of All Men to Save Them.

A. God's Testament means God would become man and die.

But what does it mean that God makes a testament? We often speak of the Old Testament and the New Testament, but it seems frequently we don't bother to entertain what that means. What does it mean that God makes a testament?

Well, in the first place, we should make sure we understand what a testament is. A testament is a man's last will taking effect upon his death. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament *is* of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.⁶

Now that we see that a testament only comes into force upon the death of the testator, we see that a testament is an institution peculiar only to humans, for only humans die. From this we understand that because God makes a testament, then, God would become a man and would die. 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

⁴“For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” **Romans 6:23.**

⁵“This is the forgiveness of sins; it does not occur without payment or satisfaction; but this payment is not yours. It cost Christ his body, life, and blood.” Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 52, p. 317.

⁶**Hebrews 9:16-17.**

was to come in Christ.⁷ 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.’⁸

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 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

⁷Hence, we see that all covenants or relationships God enters into with men after Adam’s fall into sin are underpinned by the Blood of the Son of God. The only reason God’s covenant with man to keep the world turning, to keep the sun rising and setting daily, to maintain seed time and harvest, to give us our daily bread, our paychecks, pension checks, and so on, is because of the Blood of the Son of God promised in the Garden of Eden (**Genesis 3:15**).

The covenant of God with the people of Israel was underpinned and held together by the Blood of the Son of God. For this reason Moses stated to the people of Israel, “And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words. **Exodus 24:8**.”

In the New Testament, the world continues to turn only for the sake of the Blood of Christ dispensed in the Gospel for the salvation of men. St. Paul, therefore, writes: “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” **I Corinthians 11:26**.

Absolution through the Blood of the Son of God in the Gospel is the substrate upon which this fallen world continues to turn and to enjoy God’s blessings. “The world owes its continued existence to the unfinished task of the church in spreading that Word (Matt. 24:14).” The Rev. Dr. Eugene F. A. Klug, *Church and Ministry*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 135.

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

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."⁹

God making a testament means God would become man and die.

B. God becomes man and dies in order to Atonement for the sins of men and save them.

But why would God become man and die? Well, obviously, it is not for His sake because He is God, the Creator, and has no need of any human experiences or experience of His creatures. If not for Himself, then for whom? God became man and died for us, for all men, to atone for our sins. Sin induces death; for the wages of sin is death.¹⁰ God, then, became man and died in order to atone for the sins of men and give them life eternal.¹¹

Because sin against God is as large as God is and goes on as long as God goes on, namely, forever, then, it would take finite man forever to repay God – and then some! We see, then, that the doctrine of hell arises from the doctrine of God, namely, that *there is Someone that big to offend*. And because we have offended the infinite and eternal God, then, it would take a finite man all of eternity to pay off that debt. In other words, he would spend forever in hell.

For this reason, if One Man were to pay the debt, then, that Man would have to be as big as God Himself, namely, He would have to be the Infinite and Eternal Almighty God in the flesh. The Rev. John Gerhard writes:

Miserable man had angered the infinite God with his sin; therefore, he fell into an infinite evil. Such an infinite evil could be paid for and removed in no other way than with the infinite Good. Now then, apart from God nothing is infinitely good. That's why God became man, so that man be enabled to pay on the strength of the infinite divinity, so that this divine payment avail for the benefit of man on account of the personal union, and so that divine righteousness adequately accomplish this. This is the wondrous accomplishment of divine righteousness and mercy.¹²

⁹*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*44, underscore added.

¹⁰"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." **Romans 6:23.**

¹¹"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." **Romans 6:23.**

¹²The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons*, pp. 37. "Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) has rightly been classified the 'third preeminent theologian after Luther and Chemnitz.' ...

Christ, the Almighty God-Man, by His entire life, placed His Infinite Divine Majesty and Power in the Service of men in order to deliver them from sin. Jesus says:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.¹³

II. God Bequeaths to Men Absolution of Sin and Life Eternal through the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Gospel.

A. God bequeaths absolution of all sin to men through His Last Will and Testament, the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Gospel.

And because God has become man and dies, then He makes a Last Will and Testament. And what does God bequeath to men in His Last Will and Testament? He bequeaths what men need most: *absolution of all sin*. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.¹⁴

Jesus says this cup of the Sacrament of the Holy Communion *is the New Testament in His Blood*. And what is the New Testament? *The New Testament is the absolution of all sin*. The prophet Jeremiah tells us what the New Testament *absolution of all sins* when he writes:

But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their

However, while Gerhard is best remembered for his great dogmatics, the *Loci Theologici*, Gerhard produced a number of devotional volumes and preach [sic] many sermons to the ‘common man.’ The sermons in this volume were apparently preached when Gerhard was 31 years old and already superintendent at Heldburg and a Doctor of Divinity.” **Foreword** from *Seven Christmas Sermons*.

¹³**St. Matthew 20:28.** “Lutherans say that the blood of Christ, the blood of the Son of God, has infinite value in even its smallest amount – not the quantity, but the quality of the blood shed by the Son of God endows it with infinite redemptive worth – but on the other hand, since Christ poured out His blood according to the will and counsel of God, we may not say that He shed one drop of His blood superfluously.⁹⁰ ...⁹⁰ “Joh. Heermann’s hymn...: Thy blood, the precious cure, So potent is and sure, One drop can bring salvation, To very soul and nation. Yea, from Hell’s mouth and quiver Can rescue and deliver.” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 381.

¹⁴**I Corinthians 11:25.**

hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.¹⁵

God, then, bequeaths to all men in His Last Will and Testament, namely, the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Gospel¹⁶, the absolution of all sins.

B. God bequeaths to men life eternal through the absolution of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Gospel.

And so precious to men is what God bequeaths to them, namely, absolution of sin and life eternal, that not only did He suffer to die on the Cross in order to bequeath to men this Blessing in His Last Will and Testament, but also when He bequeaths it to men in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, He seals the absolution with His Infinitely Precious Body and Blood¹⁷ in order to impress us with His earnestness that He is forgiving our sins in the Sacrament and that He is granting us life eternal in the Sacrament. For St. Paul writes:

After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.¹⁸

So eager and with such Passion does God desire to show us *He is in complete earnest when He comes to absolve us of sin and gives us life eternal* that He seals the absolution in the

¹⁵**Jeremiah 31:33-34**, underscore added.

¹⁶The Gospel is the Word and Sacraments: “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.*80, 81, *Triglotta*, p. 411.

¹⁷“**For what purpose, then, do we approach the Lord’s Table?** We approach the Lord’s Table –A. Chiefly to receive forgiveness of our sins and thus to be *strengthened in our faith* in our Lord Jesus Christ...” *The Small Catechism*, p. 200.

¹⁸**I Corinthians 11:25.**

Sacrament with His infinitely Precious Blood. For this reason, Christ says of the Sacrament that He desired with great passion to institute the Sacrament for us. St. Luke the Evangelist writes:

And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat the passover with you before I suffer....¹⁹

Through the Last Will and Testament of God, the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Gospel, God bequeaths to men absolution of sin, life eternal, and the glorious blessings of heaven. The Lutheran Church confesses:

For here He offers to us the entire treasure which He has brought for us from heaven, and to which He invites us also in other places with the greatest kindness, as when He says in St. Matthew 11, 28: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Now it is surely a sin and a shame that He so cordially and faithfully summons and exhorts us to our highest and greatest good, and we act so distantly with regard to it, and permit so long a time to pass [without partaking of the Sacrament] that we grow quite cold and hardened, so that we have no inclination or love for it. We must never regard the Sacrament as something injurious from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy imparting salvation and comfort, which will cure you and give you life both in soul and body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved.²⁰

Conclusion

The Sacrament of Holy Communion is God's Last Will and Testament to men, the Gospel.²¹ For in the Holy Sacrament, God Himself bequeaths to us what we need the most:

¹⁹St. Luke 22:15.

²⁰*The Large Catechism, Part Fifth. Of the Sacrament of the Altar.* 66-67, 68, *Triglotta*, p. 7 69. "This power [of the keys] is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, according to their calling, either to many or to individuals. For thereby are granted, not bodily, but eternal things, eternal life. These things cannot come but by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, Rom. 1, 16: *The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*" *The Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII: Of Ecclesiastical Power.* 8-9, *Triglotta*, p. 83.

²¹"But just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike our hearts, so the rite itself strikes the eye, in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word and of the rite is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is a *visible word*, because the rite is received by the eyes, and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word.

absolution of all sin.

Because the wages of sin is death, the absolution of that sin in the Holy and Blessed Sacrament can mean nothing else than life and salvation²². And God is so much in earnest to impress upon our hearts and mines that He desires absolution and life for men that He seals this Precious Absolution with His own Body and Blood in the Sacrament.

Through the Precious Gift of the Last Will and Testament of God, the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Gospel, God Himself bequeaths to all men all the blessings and riches of His Kingdom, including absolution, saving faith, the life everlasting, the resurrection of the body, and all the riches and glories of His eternal Kingdom.

Amen.

Therefore the effect of both is the same.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII (VII): Of the Number and Use of the Sacraments.*5, Triglotta, p. 309.

The Gospel is God’s Word and Sacraments: “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.*80, 81, Triglotta, p. 411.

²²“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.” *The Small Catechism*, p. 21.