

Advent Vespers III
The Third Sunday in Advent
14 December 2014
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“The New Covenant is the New Testament, i.e, Absolution and Faith.”

Jeremiah 31:31, 33, 34

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: ... 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.

Introduction

What is this New Covenant? This New Covenant is the Covenant of Absolution and faith. For Jeremiah writes of the remission of sins (Absolution) and the knowledge of God in the heart (faith).

This New Covenant is in fact the New Testament, which Testament underpins all covenants God has made with men throughout history. Indeed, the New Testament underpins the greatest temporal covenant God has with man, namely, to keep the world turning, the sun rising and setting, seedtime and harvest coming, hearth and home, and so on.¹ This Testament is

¹“Holy Scripture is very explicit in teaching that the present world exists, by virtue of God’s express will and providence, for the sole purpose that the Gospel of Christ, the message of God’s gracious forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ’s vicarious satisfaction, may be proclaimed in it. In Matt. 24, 14 Christ tells us this very clearly and emphatically; He engraves it, as it were, upon brass and granite by declaring: ‘This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come,’ namely, the end of the world. God has indeed purchased mankind at a great cost. With the blood of Jesus Christ, His incarnate Son, He has paid the price for sinful man’s eternal salvation, and now He permits the world to stand in order that in it the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ may be proclaimed and that this Gospel-message may be accepted by men through faith.”

God's Word and Sacraments because Christ says of the Sacrament of the Altar, "This is my blood of the New Testament".

The New Covenant is the relationship of God to men since the coming of Christ throughout the Last Half of human history unto the end of the age when Christ comes again in glory. The New Covenant is the New Testament, Absolution and faith through God's Word and Sacraments, through which sins are forgiven, men are saved, and life everlasting is given.

I. All Covenants of God with Man are Underpinned by the Last Will and Testament of the Son of God.

A. The Law of Moses and creation are covenants of God with men underpinned by the Last Will and Testament of the Son of God.

But what is a covenant? A covenant is simply an arrangement between individuals or groups.² In Scripture, the arrangement is between God and men.

One of the most familiar of these covenants is the Law of Moses. Therein God made a covenant or an arrangement between Himself and the people of Israel. Moses writes:

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.³

Why would Moses seal the covenant with God with blood? Moses sealed the covenant with God because it was underpinned or held together by the Last Will and Testament of the Son of God. The Apostle St. Paul 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. Whereupon neither the first *testament*⁴ was dedicated

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, **The Christian World View**, *What is Christianity?*, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, reprinted 1997, Third Printing, August 1999 pp. 31, 32.

²"a binding and solemn agreement by two or more person, parties, etc. to do or keep from doing some specified thing; a compact." *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, p. 420, s. v. "covenant".

³**Exodus 24:8.**

⁴St. Paul uses the word "testament". 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.

without blood. 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.⁵

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]”⁶. Once again this covenant or relationship was underpinned by the Blood of Jesus Christ, by His Death and, therefore, His Testament.

Not only was the Law of Moses underpinned by the Last Will and Testament of the Son of God, but so also is God’s creation. Jesus says:

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 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]”. Once again, this covenant or relationship, was underpinned by the Blood of Jesus Christ, by His Testament.

⁵**Hebrews 9:16-20.**

⁶**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 an 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, an 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.**

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.⁷

The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

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.⁸

Hence, the world turns while the Blood of the New Testament is being administered and ceases to turn in this age when that Work is done.⁹

Because creation would have come to a halt because of Adam's sin, the Last Will and Testament of the Son of God keeps the world turning and underpins that relationship God has with all men. The Last Will and Testament of the Son of God also underpinned God's relationship with the people of Israel under Moses.

B. The Last Will and Testament of the Son of God means God would become man and die for the sins of the world.

The Last Will and Testament of the Son of God means that God would become man and die. The Apostle 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. 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. Whereupon neither the first *testament* was dedicated without blood.¹⁰

⁷**St. Matthew 28:19-20.**

⁸**St. Matthew 26:27-28.**

⁹“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.

¹⁰**Hebrews 9:15-18.**

God insofar as He is God cannot die. But now that God has become Man in Jesus Christ, He can and indeed did die for the sins of all men. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

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.¹¹

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 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.*¹²

Because God speaks of His Relationship with men throughout history as a *testament*, we then know that God would become man and die for the sins of all men. 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

¹¹Acts 20:28.

¹²*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*⁴⁴, underscore added.

unless he became man. Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, "testament."¹³

The Last Will and Testament of the Son of God means God would become man and die for the sins of the world.

II. The New Covenant is the New Testament.

A. The New Covenant is the New Testament of Absolution and faith.

Now that this Great Work of Christ has been completed, all that remains is to distribute the Fruits of Christ's Passion. The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

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.¹⁴

The Lutheran Church confesses the Truth that the Fruits of Christ's Passion are distributed through God's Word and Sacraments:

For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves.¹⁵

The New Covenant, therefore, is nothing but the New Testament of Absolution and faith. Jeremiah writes:

... 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.¹⁶

¹³*Luther's Works*, Vol. 36: 38, underscore added.

¹⁴**St. Matthew 26:27-28.**

¹⁵*The Large Catechism, Part Second, Of The Creed, Article III.38-39, Triglotta*, 689.

¹⁶**Jeremiah 31:34.**

B. Because the New Covenant is nothing but the New Testament of Absolution and faith, everyone regardless of human standing is part of Christ's Church.

Because the New Covenant is nothing but the New Testament, no external considerations, e.g., belonging to a particular nation or lineage like Israel, come to bear because membership in Christ's pertains only to Absolution and faith. For this reason the prophet Jeremiah writes:

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 sins no more.¹⁷

The Apostle St. Paul likewise writes that no temporal distinctions arise in the Church in terms of membership in the Church:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.¹⁸

Again, the Apostle St. Paul writes that no human distinction arises in the Church in terms of membership because the Bond that Brings and Holds the Church together is Absolution and faith alone:

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus¹⁹

¹⁷**Jeremiah 31:34.**

¹⁸**Galatians 3:26-29.**

¹⁹**Romans 3:21-24.**

The Saving Knowledge of the Lord, i.e., the Gospel, writes into the hearts of men the True Knowledge of God.²⁰ The Saving Knowledge of God is to know Who the True God is, namely, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, One God in Three Person, and that He freely forgives all sins for Christ's sake. On this Eve of His Passion, Christ prayed:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.²¹

Luther writes of the Saving Knowledge of God:

Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53[:11]: “By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous.” This means: “He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil's jaws solely through this; that they know Him and who He is.” ... Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: “Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches” – in short, let no one boast at all – “but if anyone wants to boast, let him boast in this, that he knows Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth.”²²

Because the Saving Knowledge of God is the Gospel, the Knowledge of God is given to everyone, whether old or young. Hence, the prophet Jeremiah writes:

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.²³

The greatest know Who the Lord is through the Saving Knowledge of the Gospel. Likewise, the least, e.g. infants, possess the Saving Knowledge of the Lord and Know Him because they are Baptized for the remission of sins. The Apostle St. Peter states in his Pentecost sermon that the Promises of Holy Baptism are for children, too:

²⁰“Axiom: *Lex praescribit, evangelium inscribit* [The law prescribes, the Gospel inscribes] (Jeremiah 31:31-34).” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 79, translation from the Latin in brackets is added.

²¹**St. John 17:3.**

²²Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 35, 36.

²³**Jeremiah 31:34.**

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. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.²⁴

All that is needed for the uniting of the Church is Absolution and faith. For the New Covenant includes no other provisos – no particular nation, no particular geography, no particular lineage – other than one has the blessings Christ procured for them through His Passion.

Conclusion

The New Covenant is the New Testament. The Law of Moses is gone because Christ has fulfilled and completed it²⁵. **Now the only relationship that remains for men with God is Absolution of all sins for Christ’s sake and faith – birth, or station in life, or locale, not entering at all into the equation.**

Through the New Testament comes Absolution and saving faith, life eternal, and the resurrection of the body, for all men throughout the world until the end of the age.

Amen.

²⁴**Acts 2:38-39.**

²⁵Moses, therefore, instructed the people to follow the Law of Moses until the coming of the Prophet, i.e., the Messiah. “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” **Deuteronomy 18:15.**