

# GOD'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT



## Hebrews 9:15-22

Today's passage is one that requires you to go back and read it several times. You read it once and you go "Huh - what was that all about? It takes some thought (not a bad thing) because it contains an analogy or comparison not used elsewhere in Scripture.

And this is a comparison that is fraught with possible misunderstanding! Frequently in the Bible God uses language to get at who he is and how he relates to people that carries a ton of possible misunderstanding.

- You all know that the second coming of Jesus as compared to a "thief in the night". A thief compared to Jesus - I would have never done that!
- Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. [God is a woman, or a chicken!]"

Why does God, in many places, use analogies and comparisons that are loaded with possible abuse?

Here's the reason. *All human language is loaded with possible misunderstanding and abuse.* Because God is unique. He is so different from us in so many ways, and yet he wants to communicate with us. The only language he has to communicate with us is our language. And it's a language that has been built around human experience. And were not like God.

A common metaphor, analogy used in the Bible is servanthood. If God wants to communicate something about our service to him, the Bible calls us his servants.

But it also says we are His children. But servants and children are very different in a household... So, if we are servants of God, does that mean we are not children of God? Does it mean we are not heirs of God? Does it mean that we live in servants' quarters and have no place at the Father's table? (No, that's not the point, but you see how utterly misleading our language can be) That's just one illustration.

All comparisons between the way God relates to us and the way we relate to him are like that. You have to ask, "What part of this comparison or analogy

leads into the deep truth God wants to reveal about himself, and what part of it leads down a dead end road to misunderstanding?"

Now in this text there is a comparison made that is fraught with danger, as we will see in a moment - between the "new covenant" and a "last will and testament."

**V. 15** is the topic, that **vv. 16-22** are based off of. All about Jesus Christ and the New Covenant that he ushered in.

First let's review to make sure we **remember what the covenant is**, and how it is different from the "first covenant" that Paul refers to here in **verses 15 and 18**.

The new covenant is the arrangement with his people that God promised in **Jeremiah 31:31**. The book of Hebrews quotes the terms of this arrangement in **Hebrews 8:10 & 12**. It says,

<sup>10</sup> *This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord.*

*I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ...*

<sup>12</sup> *For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

So in the Old Covenant, God put His summary-will on tablets of stone. And he says, "this is how my people should live." And it's written in stone and it's out there. And unless something happens inside, very often the flesh rises up and says, "I don't like your rules." And our heart rebels, "You say, don't steal, don't commit adultery, love your neighbor, remember the Sabbath and worship me, give me a sacrificial offering." "I don't want to do that, or if I do that I won't really like it." *That's the old covenant, pressing on us, with legal constraint, from the outside, saying "Do this".*

Now, in the New Covenant, this law gets written in the heart and put on the mind. What's that? That's God going from outside to inside, by his Spirit, and shaping us so that we love it! We look at it now and say, "I've got God, why would I want to lie? I've got God, why would I want to steal? I love to keep the Sabbath and worship him. I count it a privilege to get

God a sacrificial offering. I love the will of God” That’s Christianity. Christianity is not a list, outside, pushing to make you do what you do not want to. Christianity is God going inside, in love, changing you, writing it on your heart, so that you begin to have affections for him that are so transforming that you love his will. That’s the new covenant.

**NOT ONLY THAT**, it says that in the new covenant He will *remember our sins no more*. Before God can come in and write his law on your heart, he’s got to forgive your sins, because God doesn’t inhabit unforgiven people.

In the old covenant there had been no sacrifice that could truly take away human sin. So the new covenant, and we see this at the end of **verse 15**, promises that these sins will be taken away because of the sacrifice of God’s own Son.

SUMMARY. So the new covenant is all about how God deals with sin to make us right with him. And how God deals with the power of sin by writing the law on our hearts so that we hate sin and love God’s will and walk in his ways *freely*, not merely by external legal constraint. That’s the new covenant. That’s Christianity.

### God’s Last Will and Testament

Well, in today’s text the writer introduces the comparison between the “new covenant” and a “last will and testament.” And that analogy is fraught with possible misunderstanding!

Verse 15. No problem. Nothing new that he hasn’t already said about Christ.

But when we get to **verse 16** and it’s very jarring. The comparison with a Last Will and Testament.

Hebrews 9:16–17 <sup>16</sup> *In the case of a will*, [this is the same word as “covenant”...but it’s clearly a will] *it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it*, <sup>17</sup> *because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living*.

So it’s clear that this is talking about a Last Will and Testament. Now you all know what that is. But maybe the children don’t. A “last will and testament” is an official document, so that when you die what is yours goes to who you wanted to go to. Every adult should have one.

Now why does this writer do this? Why does he make this comparison -this idea that the new covenant is in

fact like a “last will and testament”?

That’s really dangerous. Really dangerous. “God’s last will and testament” - does that bother you? So that when HE DIES he makes sure that those who remain get what they’re supposed to? That ought to bother you.

I think there are at least four reasons.

1) This is the ordinary meaning of the term in the common Greek culture of those days: a “diatheke” was a “last will and testament” in almost all Greek documents outside the New Testament. It’s only in the Bible where this word is connected with the Hebrew word “berith” meaning covenant.

2) The writer saw that the basis of the new covenant is the death of Christ. A death had to take place to give force and validity to the new covenant. So it is like a last will and testament. A death makes it come into effect.

3) He looks back to the old covenant and notices that even the first covenant was associated with a death. Look at **verse 18**, “... *even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood.*”

He asks, “Why is there so much blood in the Old Covenant?” In the Israelite religion there is blood everywhere! You sanctify the curtains with blood, the animals are sacrificed constantly, the blood gets sprinkled on the altar and everything practically. The blood is sprinkled on the door posts. Why is there so much blood?!” [If there was CSI and that blue light...]

And he thinks, “it’s all about death. Even there in the Old Testament there is a pointer toward a death that’s got to happen for all the promises of God to be brought into force.” And so even the first covenant was validated by a death, and therefore was like a “last will and testament” in that sense.

4) The fourth reason the writer treats the new covenant as a “last will and testament” is that in **verse 15** he has just referred to an “*eternal inheritance*.” And we can all see that if there is an inheritance there must be some kind of WILL that tells who the heirs are and what inheritance they get. That is what he says the new covenant does.

For these reasons, at least, the writer says that the new covenant is like a “last will and testament.” Yes, but this is a daring way to talk about God’s relation to his people.

### QUESTIONS

Like I said before, this analogy is fraught with possible misunderstanding. It is so filled with blasphemous possibilities that we need to be very careful to discover what God is saying that is true in it, and separate out the rest. Several questions came to me ...

1) Did God write a last will and testament because one day He would die, and wanted to leave his possessions to another?

2) If God dies, who is the *executor* of God's last will and testament? A will usually specifies that, and it is never the dead person who executes his own will.

3) If a will does not go into effect before the death occurs, what does that mean about forgiveness for the Old Testament saints? If not in force, how did David and Moses and all the saints get forgiveness for sins?

4) Who are the heirs of this last will and testament? Is the inheritance of God left to an uncertain, indefinite group? Or are there names written in the will? Dave Saylor, \_\_\_\_\_.

Let's look at the answers to these four questions and I hope doing that will deepen and strengthen our security in God and our confidence that the eternal inheritance, eternal life, that is ours through Christ.

**1) Did God write a last will and testament because he would one day die, and wanted to leave his possessions to another?**

The closest answer we get to that question in Hebrews is in **2:14**.

<sup>14</sup> *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil <sup>15</sup> and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

"Yes and No." Human language, comparisons like this breakdown, so we must say, a qualified "yes and no."

In other words, NO, as God cannot die. He is "immortal" as 1 Timothy 1:17 says.

But YES, he wills to experience death so as to destroy death from the inside and deliver those who are enslaved to death. How can the immortal experience death? He takes on the flesh-and-blood human nature as his own and in that nature experiences death. So the answer is Yes, God wrote a Will because he intended to experience death in the death of his Son through the human nature that he took on in the incarnation.

POINT: Let this establish your faith and deepen your security and your assurance in God, because from all eternity God willed to pass on his "eternal inheritance" to you by grace (2 Timothy 1:9). And God did something astounding, that human words cannot describe adequately. He set in motion a plan to make it possible that He could die in order to allow us to have eternal life.

And all that is required for the heirs to come into their possession has been done in Christ. All we need to do is to come to Him.

### **2) Who is the Executor of God's Will?**

A will *usually* specifies who that is (spouse, eldest child, uncle, nephew etc.), and it is never the dead person who executes his own will.

The answer is that here again the comparison, analogy breaks down, and **the same person who dies to put the will in force is also the executor of the will.**

When **verse 15** calls Jesus the *Mediator of the new covenant*, the last will and testament, it means not only that he is the one whose death releases all the inheritance of God for us, but also that once that inheritance is released, *Jesus makes sure we get it!* And he is the Executor.

How can this be? Answer: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the installation of him at the Father's right hand as High Priest of all the good things to come.

You can see this in **Hebrews 13:20-21**: (need to read Bible books backwards....) <sup>20</sup> *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,* <sup>21</sup> *equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, [that's the new covenant promise] through Jesus Christ, [there's the Executor] to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

POINT: This is just filled with hope and I hope you get it. Christ and his father wrote the will in eternity past for your inheritance. Christ then clothed himself with humanity and he died in order to release the inheritance for you, so you don't have to die. **And now he rises from the dead and he is the Executor of the will to make sure you receive it!**

He wrote it, he died to affect it and now he executes it for us! My job, your job? Trust Him.

So let this establish your faith and deepen your

security and your assurance in God.

**3) Was this last will and testament, this new covenant, not in force before the death of Christ occurred? If not, how did David and Moses and all the saints get forgiveness for sins?**

**Hebrews 9:17** says, <sup>17</sup> *because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living.*

That would seem to say, “No, the forgiveness of the new covenant was not available in the Old Testament times before Christ died.” But notice again how verse 18 starts, <sup>18</sup> *This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood.*

And then he goes on to show how Moses made the shedding of blood central to the old covenant.

What's the point here? I think the point is this: it's true that in the old covenant Christ had not yet died, but all the blood-shedding of animals was meant to point forward to the day when a death would occur that would indeed purchase, once for all, the forgiveness of God, and if those saints put their faith not in animals, but in the grace of God, they could have a foretaste of that experience now.

In other words, some, but not all, of the New Covenant, (this last will and testament) was inherited before the death of Christ (Hebrews 11:39-40).

Here again the analogy is not perfect. Yes, without the death of Christ there would be no forgiveness in the Old Testament. But, No, those saints did not have to wait thousands of years to experience the forgiveness that the death bought for them.

POINT: So let this strengthen your faith in the greatness of Christ's achievement on the cross: it was great enough to release the inheritance of forgiveness not only forward two thousand years to us, but also backward thousands of years.

And right now maybe someone here will realize that “if God’s grace can stretch back to forgive them and their sins, then it could reach forward to ME and forgive me my sins today!”

**4. Finally, Who are the heirs of God's last will and testament?**

Is the inheritance of God left to an uncertain, indefinite group? Or does he have in view particular people that he loves as children, and to whom he leaves his eternal inheritance?

The answer is found in **verse 15**, specifically in the word "*called*." The writer says, <sup>15</sup> *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance...*

Who receives the eternal inheritance? "*Those who are called*." Called by whom? Called by God. In other words, God's last will and testament is not left to chance.

So my final question to you is the most important of all. Do you hear God's call?

I plead with you to open your spiritual eyes to behold the glory of the Lord in the gospel. To open the spiritual ears of your heart to hear the voice of your Shepherd.

Did you hear the call of God?

God not only wrote the will;

- and he not only put it in force by the death of his own Son;
- and he not only raised his Son to be the Executor of that will;
- and he not only spread the inheritance of eternal life backward for thousands of years and forward for thousands of years;
- but he is also today calling people out of darkness and death and unbelief to become fellow heirs with his Son.

Give heed to his call. Open your spiritual ears to the voice of your Shepherd, and your spiritual eyes to the glory of your God. And believe.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Once again I am deeply indebted to the excellent work of John Piper for most all of this message on this difficult passage.