

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH VII: 4-6

(Reading: Hebrews 9:11-28)

Where There's His Will There's Only One Way!

In this teaching about the covenant that God has taken with us the Westminster Confession now paints it in a different way. For in considering the Articles 1 till 3 of Chapter 7 we considered this as a particular type of covenant. A form of covenant which stands out in Scripture, because this is the covenant that a great power takes with a much weaker vassal – the covenant which graciously allows the one who would be due for total destruction the opportunity to live.

Now, in Article 4, we confess that Scripture shows this covenant of grace also as a testament – a testament in this case which is a will.

I'm sure we've all heard of the expression "This is the last will and testament of...". They are the opening words of the document that people prepare to arrange their affairs after they have died. It details how all their worldly assets are to be dispersed. That's why it's called a 'Will', for it's the way they wanted it to be sorted out.

So a Will is a vital document. It saves disputes between family members and others when someone has died. And the more specific it is, the better it is.

Unless, of course, the Will becomes disputed. Then it will end up making money for lawyers. And what the person making that Will intended may be quite drastically changed.

This was shown on an occasion when a church, together with a Christian senior citizen's home, became the sole beneficiaries in a will. The children of that lady got nothing. And to be honest, they got what they deserved, for they had done nothing for that frail old lady. They rarely ever visited her. And they definitely never were ever around to help her.

The members of her church and those in that Christian organisation had cared for her. And the love they showed she thanked through the provision in her will. A provision, however, that the minister and the deacon told her not to do. The last thing they wanted was being part of that will. But she chose to do it. And her children disputed it. Over a few thousand dollars there was this demonstration of terrible spite. In the end, there was a settlement, done through the lawyers, for a fifty-fifty break up between the differing parties. Though the church had advised her against doing this yet they felt they should now honour the spirit of what she wanted to do with what was hers. It was her Will after all!

And that whole saga actually proved the lady's point! Those children were only interested in themselves!

This Is The Divine Will And Testament

But this Will here is quite different than any of our earthly Wills. **THIS IS THE DIVINE WILL AND TESTAMENT.** Our first point.

Article 4 clearly pictures this to us. As it says, "This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed."

A testament simply means here a person's Will. And so let's look at this Will.

First of all, we see this Will in terms of who made it. That's crucial for any Will. For a Will is someone laying out what really matters to them. It's one time when they can be honest about what's on their heart - what's dearest to them - and know that they won't suffer any recriminations.

Of course that's one thing Jesus wouldn't have to worry about. He can openly lay out what His Will is without fear or favour. But like any other Will it's tied up with His death. As Hebrews 9 the verses 16 and 17 said, "In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living." This is why the burial of our Lord is confessed in one of the articles of the Apostles' Creed. His death was confirmed in that act.

It is this Will which our Lord is speaking about in the scriptural accounts of the last Supper. This is what we read in Luke 22 verse 20. There, after the Supper, He took the cup, and gave it to them saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

So it is a Will made by none other than the second Person of the trinity, God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. **THIS IS THE DIVINE WILL AND TESTAMENT.**

And then there is what this Will covers. This is the last part of Article 4. Because through the death of the Testator not only is one person or a few people made materially richer - the whole Church is given an eternal inheritance!

We have already seen who this is all going to benefit. The 'covenant of grace' is all for our benefit! It's God who's bent down for us. As Ephesians 1 verses 22 and 23 states, "God placed all things under Christ's feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." **THIS IS THE DIVINE WILL AND TESTAMENT.**

This Is What's Concealed In The Old Testament

But now we must acknowledge a difference. It's the difference in the outward form of this covenant between the Old and New Testaments. That's what Articles 5 and 6 go on to describe. So let's see, in the second part, that **THIS IS WHAT'S CONCEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.**

And in looking at this we note a key word in Article 5. It's the word "administered". As Article 5 begins, "This covenant of grace was differently **administered** in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel." Further on the word pops up again. For "under the law, it was **administered** by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come."

We know it was different than our time now because of these things mentioned here. But that didn't make a difference to how they were saved then. It was by faith just as we are. As Hebrews 11 verse 24 emphatically declares, it's "by faith" that Moses chose to take up the cause of his people.

You might be wondering why there is this stating of the obvious. Well it's because there has been a different belief that Christians have had about the Old Testament's relationship to the covenant of grace. In recent times this is teaching has become developed into what is called 'dispensationalism'. This is the view which has become very popular through the "Left Behind" series of books by Tim La Haye and Jerry Jenkins. They are books which have headed the New

York Times best-seller lists on a number of times. And naturally there's been a movie and kid's comics.

Forty years ago it was Hal Lindsey who had a best seller saying much the same. His book was called, "The Late Great Planet Earth". And over the last one hundred years one of the highest selling Bibles has been the Scofield Reference Bible which promoted this teaching.

These books are all very exciting reads – but they're terrible theology! For it says that in different historical dispensations God's people are saved in different ways.

Consider the first diagram on the chart. (*See attached scanned sheet #1.*)

There are seven dispensations identified and they are each given a distinct characterisation. These are based on the assumption that in each dispensation God is working with humanity in a different way. They say this is necessary because of the changes in mankind as it grows from childhood to maturity.

Each dispensation fails before the shift to the next one is made. And in each dispensation God makes different demands on man. For example, in the Mosiac dispensation the demand is obedience to the law of Moses. In the Christian dispensation, in which we are told we're living now, the demand is acceptance of the gospel through faith. The way they see the Old Testament legal prescriptions is not so far from how the Judaizers saw it in the early New Testament Church. So while many of these folk hold to the fundamentals of the faith in the Apostles' Creed, like we do, they end up adding something as well. Actually, it's more like they end up taking a lot of something away. Because they reduce the 'Church Age' to a short time they put in brackets. We are apparently just filling in the time in-between the historical kingdom of David and the future Davidic kingdom. It's in this coming kingdom that all those promises made to Israel will be fulfilled literally - in an era when the church has disappeared from the earth. That era which is more commonly called 'The Rapture'.

This is what the second diagram clearly shows in presenting their view. (*See attached sheet #2.*)

This is why you see so many believers taking such a keen interest in modern Israel. They believe that what's happening there is the fulfilment of biblical prophecy. And that's missing altogether the different administration of 'the gospel of grace' we live in now.

The Scriptural teaching is, though, that the Old Testament believers were saved in exactly the same way as we are now. The apostle Paul goes to great lengths in Romans 4 to show that Abraham was saved by faith. When they say the Church Age could only have begun with Pentecost they ignore altogether Romans 11 and Ephesians 2 when they speak about how the Gentiles have become ingrafted into Israel. They miss how the Church is the continuation of Israel spiritually.

We, in contrast to them, confess in Article 5 that the "promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews," which were "all foreshadowing Christ to come", "were, for that time," effective enough. Through the operation of the Spirit God gave what was needed "to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah". By Him "they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation." So those Old Testament believers knew the Messiah was coming. All these things the LORD told them to do pointed to that. But those things were only a shadow of what was to come. As Hebrews 11 concludes its great chapter on faith in verses 39 and 40, "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what was promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

That's why this second aspect is called THIS IS WHAT'S CONCEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. Because, in the words of our third part, THIS IS WHAT'S REVEALED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

This Is What's Revealed In The New Testament

In Luke 2, Simeon and Anna realised this fulfilment of Israel in meeting that Christ-child in the temple. They prophesied of what He was about to do, and it certainly wasn't because the last dispensation had failed. It was because it all came together in God's Son.

Let's draw back into the Old Testament with this truth, because the dispensationalists have got their idea from the Bible. There has been a change between the Old and New Testaments. But it was the change of growth and development.

You can see that through the various dispensations the Scripture speaks of. After the fall into sin Genesis 3 verse 15 has God's promise of a Saviour. It was also then that sacrifice as a substitutionary offering came in. Those believers then knew a price had to be paid. Through Noah we see more shown of God's saving purpose. That's what Genesis chapter 9 tells us. Meanwhile, nothing changed in terms of what was done in worshipping God from before, as Genesis 8 the verses 20 till 22 prove.

With Abraham much more was brought out. The promise became much more detailed, as Genesis 17 relates. The splendour of God's plan is brighter. Then through Moses what was in the covenant of grace is brought out even further. The blood sacrifice which is central right through from Genesis 3 is intricately detailed in the ritual of the tabernacle and temple services. In the moral law the covenant is expounded. And right throughout the Mosaic economy there's that grateful response to the covenant Lord.

So it was becoming clearer the further time went on how there was and could only be one way of salvation. That's where I refer you to the third diagram. (*See attached sheet #3*).

It's this theme which alone ties together the Scriptures. For how else can the Bible speak of the Church as an Body which is found through all ages and all places? As Stephen proclaims in Acts 7 verse 38 about Moses: "He was in the congregation in the desert, with our fathers and with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai; and he spoke living words to pass on to us."

Here's the reason why the Old Testament ordinances are replaced by New Testament ordinances and yet their names can be used interchangeably. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 7, "For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed." And in Colossians 2, the verses 11 and 12, the apostle writes, "In Christ you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with the circumcision done by the hands of man but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

You see, the Will has come into its complete force. Through the death of the Testator everything now is clear. THIS IS WHAT'S REVEALED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. As G.I Williamson noted, "The covenant of grace has not changed, but because it is now fully revealed and wholly accomplished, it may be seen with greater simplicity, clarity, fullness and efficacy than was the case in any previous era."

And let's realise this is the last administration of this covenant of grace. The administration in the Old Testament was preparatory - this one now is final, as far as this present world is concerned. There's only the eternal administration of the covenant which Christ will do in the new heavens

and the new earth which is still to come. Then the words of Ephesians 1 the verses 9 and 10, will come true, “And God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

The goal of God’s covenantal dealings through this is the gathering and sanctifying of His people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. That’s how Revelation 7 verse 9 puts it. And then in Revelation 21, the verses 1 and 2, we see that they’ll one day live in the new Jerusalem in a renewed world order. There the covenant relationship will find its fullest expression. As the third verse of Revelation 21 says, “They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

So the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments has to declare what Christ has done. But it must just as much telling forth what He’s doing right now and when He returns. And that’s going to be oh so soon!

Are you ready?