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Donald Roth

Dordt College, donald.roth@dordt.edu

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What is Jesus' Will?

Abstract

"The contract made in the Old Testament between God and His people has been fulfilled by Christ, and the blessing secured by that fulfillment ('I will be your God') has been granted to us."

Posting about the New Covenant in Christ from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/what-is-jesus-will/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

What is Jesus' Will?

 [inallthings.org/what-is-jesus-will/](https://allinallthings.org/what-is-jesus-will/)

Donald Roth

“Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.”Hebrews 9:15-17 (ESV)

The word “will” can mean many things. “Will” can be a synonym for desire. For Christians, we talk about God’s Will as something that we do or seek to carry out. We debate the extent of free will and what degree of choice we have in the salvation process. Extended into the legal world, a will is a final statement of our wishes for how our property should be divided among our heirs. In this context, getting “written out of/into the will” is shorthand for an answer to the often contentious issue of inheritance. In Hebrews 9, the author uses the Greek word often rendered “covenant” to refer to the New Covenant in Christ as a will in this latter sense.¹ So what does it mean for us to think of the New Covenant in this way?

The New Covenant as a Will

The concept of the covenant plays a central role in Christian theology, particularly in the Reformed tradition. However, the covenant is traditionally described in contractual or promissory terms, something which carries with it the concept of two parties and a sense of mutual obligation. The first five books of the Bible are known as the “Book of the Covenant,” and they contain the history and terms of the agreement God made with His people in delivering them from Egypt, an agreement which carried with it both blessing and curse dependent on the people’s faithfulness.

If we think of the New Covenant as a will, rather than a contract, the imagery is totally different. It draws into sharper focus sometimes difficult theological terms like substitutionary atonement or imputation. If the wages (what we earn) of sin are death, what are the wages of righteousness? Eternal life. So Jesus, in His perfect life, earned for Himself an inheritance, a wage, that He did not collect. Hebrews points this out as a wonderful assurance, for Christ did not die without an heir. Instead, He has designated us as beneficiaries of His merited reward through His will: the New Covenant.

Living in the New Covenant

So how does this impact our lives? What does it mean if we start to imagine the New Covenant as a will rather than a contract? For one thing, if the covenant is a will, it has already taken effect. While you might worry about getting disinherited while your parents are alive, that isn’t really a concern once they’ve passed. The promise that we inherit then in Christ is of something accomplished. The contract made in the Old Testament between God and His people has been fulfilled by Christ, and the blessing secured by that fulfillment (“I will be your God.”) has been granted to us.

For another, to paraphrase and apply Paul’s imagery from Galatians 4: workers sign a contract, children receive an inheritance. Thinking of the New Covenant as a will directs us to the even more glorious truth of our blessing through Christ: we have been adopted as children of God. The author of Hebrews will go on in

chapter 12 and 13 to remind his readers that our adoption is a call to hope and endurance, a promise that all things work for our good, and an assurance that even suffering and trial are the discipline that God uses to mold us, to teach us empathy and wisdom, and to shape us into even more powerful workers in His kingdom.

I don't know if thinking of the blessing of Christ as a will is something you've always done, or if, like me, it tweaks your imagination to conceptualize the covenant kingdom and our role in it in a different light, but imagery can be a powerful thing, and I invite you to dive into Hebrews for yourself and see how thinking about the New Covenant in this way can strengthen your faith, give you hopeful assurance, and energize you to new works of love.²

Footnotes

1. This isn't totally alien to English, since the same word can be rendered "testament" and we naturally think of the Old/New Testament as referring to the Old/New Covenant while also formally referring to a will as a "last will and testament." ↩
2. Particularly, try reading Hebrews 10:19 and following as a meditation on the themes of faith (Chap. 11), hope (chap. 12), and love (chap. 13) rooted in the argument and discussion developed earlier in the book. I have been greatly blessed to do this over the past academic year with the Adult Sunday School class that I lead at my church. ↩