

Hebrews 9:15–20 — The Words of a Testator

The Death That Seals the Inheritance, The Inheritance Is a Person, Incorruptible and Undefiled and That Fadeth Not Away

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 9:15–20; Galatians 3:18; 4:30; Ephesians 1:11; 1 Peter 1:3–5

“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)

“To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:4–5)

The Words of a Testator: Words Sealed in Death

Of all the words that exist in the world — and words are abundant and cheap — some of the most significant are the words of a testator: the words of someone who has died. When a person dies leaving a testament, those words are sealed. They are of force after death; before that, the testament has no binding power. This is the legal principle that the author of Hebrews draws upon to illuminate the significance of the death of Christ.

The Scripture is the word of God, and within it are the words of a testator, because Christ has died. These words are therefore sealed in blood, sealed in death, and of full force and authority. Every promise of the inheritance, every

word about what belongs to those who have believed on the Lord Jesus, carries the weight not merely of a promise but of a testament ratified by the death of the one who made it. Neither the first testament was dedicated without blood (verse 18). The entire principle of covenant between God and man, from Moses onward, was inaugurated in blood. How much more the better covenant, sealed in the blood of the Son of God himself.

For the Redemption of the Transgressions Under the First Testament

Verse 15 adds a remarkable dimension: Christ 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. The death of Christ reached backward as well as forward. The saints of the Old Testament who died in faith, whose sins were covered by the blood of animals that pointed forward — those transgressions were not merely covered provisionally. They were redeemed by the death of the testator who had promised the inheritance to them. The redemption of Abraham's sins, of David's sins, was secured by the death of Christ just as surely as the redemption of ours.

The Inheritance Is Not a Big Box Store: It Is a Person

Ephesians 1:11 says: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. The inheritance is in him — in a person. Not in a collection of things or blessings distributed from a heavenly storehouse, but in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Heaven is not like a large store where the shelves are stocked with wonderful things in every color and variety, and we get to walk along the aisles and choose

what appeals to us. In that imagined heaven, the choosing would be ours, the variety would be the attraction, and the things themselves would be the treasure. That is entirely wrong. Heaven is where Jesus is. He is the inheritance. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son — and what God gives, when he gives Christ, is the best of heaven. There is no better gift remaining after that one. When he gives the Son, he gives everything.

This is also why the inheritance is not subject to loss or corruption. Things can be stolen; persons cannot be taken away in the same sense. The Lord Jesus said, no man plucketh them out of my Father's hand. Our inheritance — which is himself — is kept by a power that is not subject to rust, thieves, or decay. He is incorruptible, undefiled, and he fades not away. Therefore the inheritance that is in him has those same qualities.

The Inheritance Is Not of Law But of Promise

Galatians 3:18 makes the distinction absolutely clear: for if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. These are mutually exclusive principles. The inheritance cannot be earned by law-keeping and given by promise at the same time. God's gift of the inheritance to Abraham was unconditional — given before the law was introduced, given to a man on the basis of faith, given as the expression of God's sovereign grace.

Galatians 4:30 draws the corresponding negative conclusion: cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. The one who stands before God on the ground of law-keeping — the Ishmael principle, the flesh taking up the promise by its own effort — has no part in the inheritance. The son of the bondwoman does not share the heir's portion. To be cast out is not a pleasant thing; it is a dreadful thing. But it is the consequence of the principle. The inheritance is for those who have come to God on the ground of faith in his promise, not by the works of the law.

Incorruptible, Undefined, Fadeth Not Away: The Threefold Description

First Peter 1:3–5 gives what may be the most complete description of the inheritance in Scripture. Born again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Every inheritance in this present world is corruptible — it comes and goes, it is liable to decay, theft, legal dispute, and the simple passage of time. The great estates of history have scattered; the fortunes of one generation become the losses of the next. But the inheritance of the believer is incorruptible: it does not decay. It is undefiled: it has not been touched by sin or by the corrupting influences that mar everything in the present order. And it fadeth not away: unlike the green things of this world that wither and are gone, this inheritance retains its freshness and fullness without diminution.

And it is reserved in heaven for you. The same Greek root that gives us reserved is used of the sealed jar, the preserved thing kept safe for the appointed time. God is the keeper of the inheritance. And on the other side: who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. The heir is kept for the inheritance, and the inheritance is kept for the heir. Both are in God's keeping. What a word that is for any soul who trembles about whether the inheritance will still be there when they arrive, or whether they themselves will arrive. The power of God keeps both.

Would it make a difference if we lived more regularly in the consciousness that we are heirs of God? Not merely once in a while, when some occasion reminds us, but habitually, as those who know that an inheritance has been set out for them in words and sealed in blood. Not a vague or unspecified inheritance, but a real one, defined in the word of God, its character described, its keeping assured,

its possession certain. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). That is a present standing, and it belongs to those who have believed on the Lord Jesus.

To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith.