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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 2—Chapter 13

**OF CHRIST, THE TESTATOR OF THE
COVENANT.**

1. First, The covenant of grace bears the name, and has the nature of a testament: it is often called the new and better testament, as administered under the gospel dispensation, (Matthew 26:28; Heb. 7:22, 9:15) in distinction from the former: it is called a testament, in allusion to the last will and testament of men. And,

1a. Because it is the will of God himself, and not another; the will of him that is sovereign and absolute, who does according to his will in heaven and in earth, in nature, providence, and grace. The covenant is founded on the will of God, and is the pure effect of it; he was not obliged to make it; he freely and of his own accord came into it; so all the contracting parties in it, as has been before observed. A man's will or testament ought to be voluntary; he is not to be forced nor drawn, nor pressed to make it, contrary to his inclination; or otherwise it is not his own will. The covenant, or testament of God, is of his own making, without any influence from another; all the articles in it are of his free good will and pleasure; as, that he will be the covenant God of his people; that they shall be his sons and daughters; that they shall be his heirs, and joint heirs with Christ; that they shall enjoy all the blessings of grace, redemption, pardon, justification, regeneration, perseverance in grace and glory; for he hath bequeathed, in this will, both grace and glory to his people (Ps. 89:11; Luke 12:32).

1b. As a will consists of various legacies to various persons, so does the covenant of grace; some to Christ, for he, under different considerations, is a legatee in it, and a testator of it: all the elect, his spiritual seed and offspring, are bequeathed unto him, as his portion and inheritance, and with which he is greatly delighted (Deut. 32:9;

Ps. 2:8, 16:6). "As my Father hath appointed unto me a kingdom", says he, (Luke 22:29) his mediatorial kingdom, a kingdom of priests, and which he disposed of to him in a testamentary way, as the word there used signifies. There are other legacies, such as before suggested, respecting grace and glory, left in this will for the brethren of Christ, among whom he is the firstborn, and so appointed principal heir, yea, heir of all things, and they joint heirs with him; and what is given to them, is in trust with him for them, particularly the inheritance bequeathed, which they obtain in him, and is reserved with him in heaven for them.

1c. In wills, what a man disposes of, is, or should be, his own; no man has a power to dispose, nor ought to dispose of, what is another's, or not his own; or otherwise, his will is a void will, and such bequests void bequests. All the blessings of goodness, whether of nature, providence, or grace, are all the Lord's own, and he has a sovereign right to dispose of them as he pleases, and to give them to whomsoever he will; and against which no one has any just cause or reason to object; and if he does, it is to no purpose; "Is it not lawful for me", says the Testator of the covenant, "to do what I will with mine own?" Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matthew 20:15).

1d. This will, or testament, of Jehovah, is an ancient one, it was made in eternity; it is called an everlasting covenant, or testament; not only because it always continues, and will never become null and void, but because it is from everlasting; the bequests and donations made in it were made before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9). It is, indeed, sometimes called a new testament, not because newly made, but because newly published and declared, at least in a more clear and express manner; a new and fresh copy of it has been delivered out to the heirs of promise.

1e. It is a will or testament that is unalterable; "Though it be but a man's covenant", or testament, "yet if it be confirmed" by his own handwriting and seal, and especially by his death, "no man disannulleth or addeth thereunto" (Gal. 3:15). The covenant of grace is ordered in all things, and sure; this testament, or will, is founded upon the immutability of the divine counsel; so that the heirs of promise, the legatees in it, may have strong consolation, and be fully assured of enjoying their legacies in it; which are the sure mercies of David, of David's Son and Antitype, as all the promises of it are Yea and Amen in him.

1f. Testaments, or wills, are generally sealed as well as signed: the seals of God's will or testament are not the ordinances; circumcision was no seal of the covenant of grace; it was a seal to Abraham, and to him only, that he should be the father of believing Gentiles; and that the same righteousness of faith should come upon them, which came upon him, when in uncircumcision: nor is baptism, which is falsely said to come in the room of it, and much less is it a seal of the covenant; nor the ordinance of the Lord's Supper; for though the blood of Christ, one of the symbols in it, is yet not that itself: but the seals are the Holy Spirit of God, and the blood of Christ; and yet the Holy Spirit is not such a seal that makes the covenant, or testament, surer in itself, only assures the Lord's people of their interest in it, by

witnessing it to their spirits, by being in them the earnest of the inheritance bequeathed them, and by sealing them up unto the day of redemption; properly speaking, the blood of Christ is the only seal of this testament, by which it is ratified and confirmed; and therefore called the blood of the covenant, and the blood of the new testament, (Zech. 9:11; Matthew 26:28; Heb. 13:20).

1g. To all wills there are commonly witnesses, and often three, and in some cases three are required. Now as God sware by himself, because he could sware by no greater; so because no other and proper witnesses could be had, to witness this will made in eternity, God himself, or the three divine Persons, became witnesses to it, the Three that bare record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost (1 John 5:7). Unless we choose to conceive of things in this manner; that as the Father, the first Person, gives the lead in all things in nature and in grace, and as he did in the council of peace, so in the covenant of grace, or in this testament, he may be considered as the maker of the will, or testament, and the Son and Spirit as witnesses to it.

1h. This will, or testament, is registered in the sacred writings, from thence the probate of it is to be taken; the public notaries, or amanuenses, that have copied it under a divine direction, are the prophets and apostles; hence the writings of the one are called the Old Testament, and the writings of the other the New Testament, the latter being the more clear, full, and correct copy. The covenant of grace having the nature of a testament, shows that there is no restipulation in it on the part of men; no more than there is a restipulation of legatees in a will; what is bequeathed to them being without their knowledge and consent, and without anything being required of them, to which they give their assent. The covenant of grace is properly a covenant to Christ, in which he restipulates; but a testament to his people, or a pure covenant of promise. Also it may be observed, that the legacies in this testament are owing to the goodwill of the testator, and not to any merit in the legatees; "For if theft which are of the law be heirs", if they that seek eternal life by the works of the law be heirs of grace and glory, then, says the apostle, "faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect", which declare it to be a free donation: and so again, "If the inheritance be of the law", or to be obtained by the works of it, "it is no more of promise"; these will not consist with, but contradict one another; "but God gave it to Abraham by promise"; as he has done to all the legatees in his covenant or will (see Rom. 4:14; Gal. 3:18).

2. Secondly, The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, may be considered as testator of the covenant of grace, as it is a will or testament, and which is plainly suggested in Hebrews 9:15-17 for,

2a. Christ as God has an equal right to dispose of things as his divine Father, seeing all that the Father has are his; as all the perfections of deity, so all persons, and all things in nature, providence, and grace; particularly all the blessings of grace and of glory. He is over all God blessed for ever, and all things are of him and owe their being to him, and are at his dispose; yea, all things are delivered by the Father to

him as mediator: and if the Spirit disposes of his gifts and graces, dividing them to every man severally as he will; the Son of God may be reasonably thought to have a power and right to dispose of the blessings of his goodness to whomsoever he pleases.

2b. Nothing is disposed of in the covenant, or testament, without his counsel and consent; for though with respect to creatures, angels and men, it may be said of God, "with whom took he counsel?" yet with his Son, the Wonderful Counsellor, the Angel of the great council, he did; for the council of peace was between them both, the Father and the Son, which respected the salvation of men, and the donation of grace and glory to them.

2c. Nor was anything given in covenant, or disposed of in the will and testament of God, but with respect to the death of Christ; all promised in covenant was on condition of Christ's making his soul an offering for sin, and of pouring out his soul unto death, (Isa. 53:10-12) all the blessings of grace bestowed on Old Testament saints, as they were legacies in this testament, so they were given forth in virtue of the blood of the covenant, which had a virtue that reached backward; Christ being the lamb slain from the foundation of the world; and there is no blessing of grace in the covenant, but what is on account of the death of Christ the testator; redemption of transgressions, that were under both the first and second testaments, was by means of death; and without shedding of blood there was no remission under either dispensation; and it is the death of Christ that secures from condemnation, as well as by it reconciliation is made.

2d. Whatever is given in this will, is given to Christ first, to be disposed of by him, so that he is the executor as well as the testator of it; he was set up as mediator from everlasting; was prevented with the blessings of goodness, or had them first given to him; he was possessed of a fulness of grace, and grace was given to the elect in him before the world began; not only the blessings of grace were put into his hands to dispose of, but eternal life, for he has power to give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him; whether this be considered as an inheritance which He, the Word of God's grace, the essential Word, is able to give among them that are sanctified by faith in him; or as a kingdom prepared for them in the purposes of God, and which Christ gives a right unto, and a meekness for; yea, he himself disposes of it in a testamentary way, "and I appoint unto you a kingdom", dispose of it to you by will and testament (Luke 22:29). Wherefore,

3. Thirdly, The death of Christ is necessary to put this will in force, to give strength unto it, that it may be executed according to the design of the maker of it; "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" (Heb. 9:16, 17). It is not the death of any, only of the testator himself, that gives validity to his will, or renders it executable; and it is only the death of Christ that gives force and strength unto, or ratifies and confirms the covenant of grace; not the death of slain sacrifices, for though by the blood and

death of these the first testament was dedicated, ratified, and confirmed in a typical way, as these were types of Christ in his bloodshed and death, (Heb. 9:19-22) yet the new testament is only, really, truly, and properly ratified and confirmed by the death of Christ itself; and whereas the Father and the Spirit were jointly concerned with Christ in making this will or testament, it was not necessary that they should die, nor could they, since they never assumed a nature capable of dying; only it was necessary that one of the testators should assume a nature capable of death, and in it die to give force to this will; and infinite wisdom judged it most proper and fitting that the Son of God should do it, who took upon him, not the nature of angels, who are incorporeal, immaterial and immortal spirits, and die not; but he became a partaker of flesh and blood, of human nature, that he might die and ratify the testament and will he was concerned in the making of; and this was necessary to give it strength and force: not as if it was alterable until the death of Christ, as the wills of men are until their death, which while they live are liable to be altered again and again; for the first thoughts of God always remain, and that to all generations; his mind is never turned, his counsel is immutable, and so his covenant and testament founded thereon is unalterable; nor that the inheritance bequeathed in this will could not be enjoyed before the death of Christ; this indeed is the case with respect to the wills of men, the legacies are not payable, nor estates bequeathed enjoyed, until the testator dies; but such is not only the certainty of Christ's death, and which with God was as if it was, before it really was, but such is the virtue and efficacy of it, that it reaches backward to the beginning of the world, as before observed; wherefore the Old Testament saints not only received the promise of eternal inheritance, but enjoyed it before the death of Christ, though in virtue of it, for they are said to "inherit the promises", that is, the things promised, (Heb. 9:15, 6:11) but the death of Christ was necessary to confirm the covenant or testament, that the legatees might appear to have a legal right to what was bequeathed to them, law and justice being satisfied thereby; so that no caveat could be put in against them, and no obstruction made to their claim of legacies, and their enjoyment of them; and no danger of this will being ever set aside. There is another concern and part which Christ has in the covenant, and that is the "messenger" of it, (Mal. 3:1) but as that respects the administration of it, it will be considered in its proper place, after the fall of man.