

Thought For The Week

Articles: [The Christian's Inheritance](#) ~1,700 words, ~300 words

The Christian's Inheritance

A testament is a will. That simple observation, drawn from an ordinary dictionary as well as from ordinary speech about “the last will and testament,” is the starting point of Mike’s lesson. If a testament is a last will, then the New Testament is not merely a collection of books. It is the instrument by which God names heirs and describes what He intends to give them. Within a will there is a list of heirs. Romans 8:16–17 supplies the list in the language of the gospel: the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified together. A father, a mother, or a close relative makes a will concerning children. God has done the same.

The New Testament therefore must be read with that fact in view. It names the heirs. It describes the inheritance. It also records how men have tried to seize an inheritance that was never theirs, how they have quarreled over inheritances that fade, and how God has reserved an inheritance that cannot be corrupted, defiled, or stolen.

The vineyard and the heir

Jesus told a parable that makes the point with terrible clarity. A man planted a vineyard, set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat, built a tower, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country. At the proper time he sent servants to receive some of the fruit. The vinedressers beat them, stoned them, wounded them, and killed some of them. Last of all the owner sent his beloved son, saying they would respect him. They did not. They said among themselves that this was the heir, that they should kill him, and that the inheritance would then be theirs. They took the son, killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.

Mark and Matthew tell the same story. The wording is not identical, and some readers, giving the matter little consideration, declare a contradiction. There is none. Matthew speaks of servants sent in groups; Mark can sound as if the owner sent one servant at a time. Whether the owner sent one servant or several, he sent his servants, and the vinedressers mistreated them. Both accounts agree that the owner then sent his son, and that the vinedressers recognized the heir and killed him in order to seize the inheritance.

The same harmony appears in the question that follows. What will the owner of the vineyard do when he comes? In Matthew the listeners answer that he will destroy those wicked men miserably and lease the vineyard to other vinedressers who will render him the fruit in their seasons. In Mark, Jesus Himself states the answer: the owner will come, destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. It makes no difference whether the people replied or whether Jesus stated the matter. The answer is the same. The owner will come. He will destroy those who murdered the heir. He will give the vineyard to others who will care for it as he intends.

The parable does not stand alone. Immediately afterward Jesus speaks of the stone the builders

rejected, which has become the chief cornerstone—the Lord’s doing, and marvelous in our eyes. Therefore, He says, the kingdom of God will be taken from them and given to a nation that will produce its fruits. Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder. The chief priests and Pharisees perceived that He was speaking of them. They had done to Jesus what the vinedressers did to the owner’s son. They sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the multitude, because they knew He had spoken the parable against them.

The vineyard is not a puzzle about ancient agriculture. It is a picture of men who saw the heir and decided that murder was the shortest road to an inheritance. God answered that decision. The kingdom was taken from those who rejected the Son and given to those who would produce its fruit.

A family quarrel and a warning

Another scene, quite different in setting, still concerns an inheritance. Jesus had been speaking to a multitude. Someone in the crowd said, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus answered, “Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” Then He warned them all: take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.

The request arose inside a family. One brother had an inheritance, no doubt from their father. Whether the man wanted only his own portion or more than the will allowed, Jesus would not settle the dispute. He was not sent to take care of problems that arise within families. Families must work those problems out. A will becomes effective when the testator dies. Jesus would not assume a position He had not been given.

What moved the man is the same thing that moved the vinedressers. They coveted the vineyard. He coveted a share of the estate. Jesus named the sin: covetousness. Earthly possessions are temporary. What a father leaves in a will lasts only a little while. A house and property may be flooded or burned. Then they are gone. Life does not consist in the abundance of things.

Christ came, however, to give an inheritance of another kind. No one receives that inheritance without becoming His child. The power to become children of God is given to those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who hear that He came and died upon the cross, and who obey the gospel. “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that does not believe shall be condemned.” On the day of Pentecost, when the people asked what they should do, Peter answered, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Remission of sins comes when we obey what God requires. God makes us His children when we become obedient to His way of salvation. Those who receive His word and are baptized are added to the church. The Lord added daily to the church those who were being saved. Those who are saved are in the church. They must remain faithful and, as children, be obedient. The will in the New Testament is effective because Christ died. A will takes effect after the testator dies, and the testator is Christ.

The word that gives the inheritance

Paul, speaking to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, charged them to take heed to themselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. After his departure, savage wolves would come in and

would not spare the flock. From among the elders themselves men would rise up, speaking perverse things to draw disciples away. Paul reminded them that for three years he had not ceased to warn everyone night and day with tears. Then he commended them to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build them up and to give them an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

The word of grace is not a decoration around the will. It is the means by which the inheritance is given. Believers receive it when they read what God desires and do what He desires. In that way they have an inheritance among the sanctified. The same blood that purchased the church is the blood that makes the will effective. The flock belongs to God because He bought it.

Ephesians 1 unfolds the same reality from another side. Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. God planned His will before the world was laid. In Christ believers have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will. Those who first trusted in Christ, and those who trusted after they heard the word of truth—the gospel of their salvation—were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Paul prayed that the eyes of their understanding would be enlightened, that they would know the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. The inheritance has been obtained. It was predestined according to God's purpose. Trust came after hearing the gospel. Belief brought the seal of the Spirit as guarantee until the redemption of the purchased possession. That possession is the church, purchased with Christ's blood. Believers have an inheritance in the kingdom of God, which is the church. The future moment of redemption corresponds to what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15: when Christ has subjected all His enemies, the last enemy being death, He will turn the kingdom over to the Father.

Admission into that kingdom comes the same way it came for the Ephesians. They heard the word of truth, believed, and obeyed. Peter's words on Pentecost still stand: repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. The inheritance is obtained when a person follows that command.

Stipulations in the will

A human will often contains stipulations. The New Testament does as well. Believers are to be imitators of God as dear children and to walk in love as Christ loved them and gave Himself for them as an offering and a sacrifice to God. Fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness should not even be named among them, as is fitting for saints. Neither filthiness, foolish talking, nor coarse jesting is fitting; rather there should be thanksgiving. No fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Those who practice such things outside the realm of Christianity cannot inherit the kingdom. The same sins, persisted in after a person has been saved, can cause a person to be disinherited. Children do not cease to be children. Sonship is not erased by the mere fact of disobedience. Yet Scripture says, "Let no one deceive you with empty words," for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. A saved person can become a child of disobedience. That

is what excludes him from the inheritance. Empty words that promise otherwise are a deception. Christians are therefore to live as imitators of God. They imitate faithful examples only as those examples imitate Christ.

An inheritance that does not fade

Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven. Earthly inheritances can be corrupted, stolen, flooded, or burned. They fade. The inheritance reserved for the Christian does not. It is incorruptible. It is undefiled. It does not fade away. It is reserved in heaven for those who have been born again to a living hope.

That is the Christian's inheritance. It belongs to those who become children of God through the gospel, who are added to the church Christ purchased with His blood, who are sealed by the Spirit as a guarantee, and who hold fast to the word of His grace. It remains theirs as long as they are faithful and live through faith. When the Lord comes and they stand before the One who gave His life for them, He will welcome them into that place. Until then the charge is simple: hang on. Continue. There is an inheritance that is incorruptible and does not fade away.

[back to top](#)

The Christian's Inheritance

A testament is a will. The New Testament, then, is not only Scripture; it is the instrument by which God names heirs. The Spirit bears witness that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16–17). A will takes effect when the testator dies. This will is in force because Christ died.

Jesus told of vinedressers who recognized the owner's son as the heir, killed him, and claimed the inheritance. The owner would come, destroy them, and give the vineyard to others. The chief priests and Pharisees perceived that He spoke of them. The kingdom would be taken from those who rejected the Son and given to a people who would bear its fruit.

Another man asked Jesus to divide a family inheritance. Jesus refused to arbitrate and warned against covetousness: life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Houses flood. Property burns. Earthly estates fade.

Christ offers another inheritance, received only by those who become His children. Belief in the Son, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins bring a person into the church He purchased with His own blood. The Lord adds the saved to that church. Paul commended elders to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build them up and give them an inheritance among the sanctified. In Christ believers have obtained an inheritance and are sealed with the Spirit as its guarantee until the redemption of the purchased possession.

The will also contains stipulations. No fornicator, unclean person, or covetous idolater has an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Disobedience does not erase sonship, but a child of disobedience can be disinherited. Empty words that say otherwise deceive.

What remains for the faithful is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heaven. Hold fast to the word. Continue. That inheritance does not fade away.

[back to top](#)