

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

God expresses His will for us through the Holy Scriptures, that is, through words. The Scriptures contain God's demands for us; they contain His promises to us. The Lord set them down in covenants — that's mostly what they're called in the Old Testament; בְּרִית in Hebrew, especially reflecting God's demands. In the New Testament there are more promises, especially promises having to do with our "*eternal inheritance*" as God's sons. That makes us think more in terms of a last will and testament. That's the Greek word διαθήκη.

Regardless, demands or promises, covenant or testament, God often sealed it with blood. That's the scene in our Old Testament lesson. Moses had been up the mountain, receiving the Lord's demands for Israel. He reported the demands to the people, and they agreed to them. "*All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.*" Then Moses took some of the blood from the oxen they had offered up in burnt offerings and peace offerings, and he threw it on the people, and said, "*Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.*"

The Israelites surely had good intentions—they weren't lying. They surely tried to keep the Ten Commandments; the Lord encouraged them in it: "*If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, ... then you shall live ...*" (Deut. 30:16). **But they failed.** They surely tried to live justly with each other according to the laws God laid down for them, and so forth; "*If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God ... by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then ... the LORD your God will bless you*"; **they failed.** For their problem was: they had no ability to keep their promise. They were born in sin, and so they naturally transgressed these laws.

God knew that would happen, and because He is a God of mercy, He gave Israel a system whereby the people's sins would be atoned for, and they could be made externally holy again. It called for more blood, with priests to slaughter animals regularly ... burnt offerings, and sin offerings, and peace offerings.

Then once a year on the Day of Atonement the High Priest would offer up a bull as a sin offering for himself, and he would take some of the blood and go into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood on the Ark and on the floor in front of it. Then he would take two goats ... one would be offered up as a sin offering for the people, and the other, bearing the sins of the people, would be released into the wilderness as an atonement before the Lord. And he would take the blood of the goat he had sacrificed and sprinkle it in the Holy of Holies as he did with the bull's

blood ... all to make atonement for the people (Lev. 16) ... sacrificing over and over and over again.

Enter Jesus Christ, who put an end to all that, not to the people's sinning — we still sin — but to the constant shedding of blood. Jesus came as our great High Priest, that He might enter into the tent. But Jesus doesn't just take over the daily and annual rituals of the Old Testament priests. His service as High Priest is the service to end the priesthood of the Old Testament. His service was "*once for all*," not for Himself as the Levitical priests had to do—Jesus was sinless—but "*once for all*" of us sinners. This is the sacrifice of atonement that He offered up, not for Himself, but for us; His was the blood by which He entered into the tent.

Moreover, this tent was not the earthly tabernacle in which the Levitical priests served. Jesus entered into "*the greater and more perfect tent*," the heavenly tent, the one "*not made with hands, ... not of this creation*."

Yes, Jesus was a different kind of priest, different than the Levitical priests, not of the Aaronic priesthood. Jesus was "*a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*" (Heb. 6:20), and by His blood was the new covenant sealed ... or better yet, the new testament ... for by His blood, He secured for us "*an eternal redemption*"; by His blood, He cleanses not just our defiled flesh, but our consciences—our hearts and minds—and sanctifies them for service to the Lord. Jesus' blood is the agent of our purification; by it—looking to Jesus and His bloody sacrifice on a cross—we are forgiven; without it, we are still in our sins.

More than that, by our baptism into Christ, into His bloody death, we have been united with Christ; we are called sons of God; we are made heirs of God. The New Testament, which Christ inaugurated, is one of an eternal glory waiting to be revealed to us. Thus, Christ's death, the shedding of His blood, has also secured for us "*an eternal inheritance*." Again, only by His death does this will come into force; only by being united with Him in a death like His will we receive our promised inheritance.

And lest we be distracted from His promise, Jesus instituted a holy ordinance through which He would distribute a downpayment on this inheritance. Surely, Jesus commands us: "*Take, eat*," and "*Drink of it, all of you*," but He does it with a promise: that He delivers to us His body broken, so that eating this bread, we may proclaim His death till He comes in glory to deliver finally the fullness of our blessed inheritance. He commands this supper with a promise: that drinking this cup He will seal His testament to us yet again with the blood of His New Testament, the blood He poured out once for us on a cross and now gives to us for the forgiveness of our sins and the assurance of life everlasting.

God is ever faithful. He is faithful to His covenants; He sealed them with blood. He sets down His demands for us now, not that we might do them and earn salvation, but He sets them down that we might know His will and know the plight of our failure. And especially, He sets forth His promises. And He is faithful to these, too, especially to the New Testament that was sealed with the blood of His own Son.

Having been baptized into Christ, we are now a part of His story; we are a part of these covenants; let us therefore eat His body, and, eating, proclaim the Lord's death; let us partake of the blood of the New Testament, and in this blood, hope in our promised inheritance.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.