

2 Peter and 2 Timothy

Last Will and Testament of the Apostles

Part 1 – Death of an Apostle

The books of the Bible are all authored by God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Yet within each of the books we find a flavor that is distinct, and most certainly reflects the mind of the human author. We do not understand precisely how inspiration worked, but we know that *“no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”* (2 Pet. 1:21). That flavor is particularly clear in the New Testament, where the limited number of authors (8-9) left their marks on the books. We tend to compartmentalize the books into genre categories; the Gospel accounts, the history of the church, letters to churches, letters to all Christians in general, letters to particular people, and the prophecy of Revelation. Yet we might add one more category to this distinction: Wills and Testaments.

A *“Last Will and Testament”* is a legal writing that becomes effective on the death of the testator, the one who wrote the will. It speaks to the disposition of the possessions of the deceased, and established those authorized to be heirs and those who will disperse these things. We use this type of language to describe the bible in general; the *“Old and New Testaments”* are a direct use of that language. In Hebrews 9:16 that language is used to specifically describe the work of Christ in the New Testament: *“for where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator”*. In fact, by simply understanding that this language is the basis of the covenants of God, we can clearly understand how the New *“Last Will and”* Testament of God necessarily entirely revoked the preceding Old *“Last Will and”* Testaments.

But we want to specifically focus on the idea that there are several books in the New Testament that are especially identified with the idea of being *“Last Wills and Testaments”* (for the sake of space let us just call them *“wills”*). These books are 2 Peter and 2 Timothy. Both are the final words of men who are about to die; they establish that they have one more gift to give, and they establish the executor of their estates. The men are Peter and Paul, apostles of Christ called by very different means, sent on very different paths (Gal. 2:7), and yet both arriving at the same moment and the same spiritual place.

Looking into both scripture and to a lesser extent some of the historical traditions of Christianity, we are able to put together the following ideas. Both Peter and Paul likely died in Rome in the reign of the Emperor Nero, who is the likely progenitor of the persecution against Christianity. Acts 28 sees Paul arriving in Rome, and while it may be the case he left afterwards, his final letter suggests that once more he is in prison and facing death in Rome (2 Tim. 1:17). Peter never tells us he is in Rome, but perhaps his mention of being in *“Babylon”* in 1 Peter 5:13 with Mark are strong clues that tell us that he too was in Rome. Peter’s mention of Paul in 2 Pet. 3 in the present tense could also be a clue that refers to their proximity; if so, when Paul writes his conclusion, it would seem that Peter has died (2 Tim. 4:11).

Peter and Paul both declare in their writings that they are about to die. Peter states in 2 Peter 1:14 that his departure is imminent. In 2 Timothy 4:6 Paul declares that he is being poured out, and the time of his departure had come too. Both men had some sense of their death long before. Jesus had prophesied in John 21 as to the type of death Peter would face (an execution), and Peter knew that this prophecy was about to be fulfilled. Paul also had been told by Jesus that he would suffer much for Christ (Acts 9:16).

But what is so truly remarkable is that here are two men who are about to face death at the hands of an executioner, a humiliating and painful death that might be avoided by merely renouncing what they had publically declared. If what they said was untrue, then they would certainly have felt a pull to make that

declaration. Yet both of their letters are clear and true on one point: Not only do they NOT repudiate the faith that they declared, but they took this last moment to declare once more that what they had seen and experienced were real, that they both did not fear death, but firmly believed that life was not over at Death, but another life awaited them.

2 Timothy 1:12 For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

2 Peter 1:15-16 And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

These men had seen Jesus, and they wanted us to know with their dying words that it was real, and that they would give up their lives in a dreadful fashion to prove that truth. Their very death was the last witness testimony (consider the word “Martyr” which means “witness”), not of their lives, but of the reality of the life of Jesus Christ.

Such testimony is not unique to these two alone. Jesus promised all of his apostles that they might die for His message. In Matthew 24:9 Jesus promised His apostles that men would kill them. Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 4:9 that the apostles were men condemned to death. Historical tradition tells us that all of the apostles (except perhaps John, as in John 21:23) were murdered in their testimony; Jesus had said that their death WOULD BE their testimony (Mark 13:9).

This testimony is the most extraordinary in human history. No other movement could claim such testimony of the veracity of its founder that the followers willingly submitted to death because of what they had witnessed in their Messiah. Thus, this final testimony, as revealed in 2 Peter and 2 Timothy, is the most profound to be offered to the legitimacy of Jesus Christ as being the Son of God.

Part 2 – Looking to the Future

When someone creates a will, they are preparing to offer to someone else a great gift. It is something that is important to them, or has great value. The intention is that someone might receive a benefit to their life by the end of our own. Perhaps part of the desire is to have a sense that our own passing has a positive purpose; there is some small pleasure in knowing that when we leave this world, something good will happen to someone else.

As Peter and Paul present the end of their lives, they have one final gift to pass on to their brethren. They have already given us such great gifts in our lives even now; Luke recorded for us in Acts their lives in serving Christ, their preaching of the Gospel, and how through hardships they stood firm in Christ. They wrote down the very words of God, and in doing so became the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19, 1 Tim. 3:15). But there is one more gift that they want to give as their lives come to an end. What is remarkable is that it is the same gift both of them desire to give: Prophecy.

In the OT there were a number of prophecies that are distributed throughout the book. The rise and fall of Israel is prophetic; the coming of certain kings (Josiah and Cyrus by name). The rise of the kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Macedonia and Rome are predicted, as well as their fall. Prophecies for the lives of certain people or cities were common too.

But in the New Testament, we see that prophecies are more often fulfilled rather than given. One might make the case that ALL of the prophecies of the Old Testament (the new kingdom, the new temple, the Messiah, etc) are fulfilled in Christ. Indeed, there are very few prophecies made in the New Testament. But those made are important. First, there is the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. Second, there is the prophecy of the coming Apostasy. Finally, most importantly, there is the prophecy of the final coming of Jesus on the Day of Judgment. It is these last two prophecies that Peter and Paul want to bequeath to us.

They both want us to remember that there will be a great falling away. Peter spends the second chapter of his letter warning us about this. He warns us that these false teachers will draw away many (vs. 2) but not all (vs. 9). Thus the last prophecy of Peter is that there will come teaching that will cause many to fall away, but a few will remain faithful. Their teaching is meant as a new doctrine to lead others astray. Peter appeals to the false teachings of Balaam, who opposed Moses, as a model of this error.

Paul too discusses with Timothy that great falling away of Christians. He focuses on this in 2 Timothy 3. In verse 13 he warns of the evil imposters who will deceive; in 2 Timothy 4:3 he warns that a time will come when (some) brethren will not endure sound doctrine, but will find teachers (Peter called them false teachers in 2:1) who will “tickle their ears”. Paul describes a false or counterfeit faith that “*has a form of godliness but denies the power*” (which is salvation). Paul appeals to the false teachings (by their magic) of Jannes and Jambres, the magicians opposed to Moses.

Second and more importantly, both Peter and Paul want to gift their heirs the greatest prophecy of all time: that Jesus is going to return one final time, and that He will return to save His own and to bring judgment to those who have rejected Him.

Paul tells Timothy this in several places. First, Paul references in chapter one “that day”, a day which his hope will be rewarded (vs. 12) as well as those who have served God (vs. 18). In Chapter 4:8 Paul again speaks of that day as the future day when Jesus will appear, to judge all, and to award the crowns of righteousness to all who love that appearance.

Peter spends more time in this prophecy in 2 Peter 3. There he makes note that many will doubt the coming of that day. Yet, pointing to the days of Noah (as did Jesus in Matt. 24) Peter tells us that this day will come like a thief in the night, without warning or signs. In that moment all things will be destroyed.

A Last Will and Testament is a document used to pass along possession to our heirs. The testator seeks that our lives would be better for the gift that they give us. We are the heirs of the apostles in the prophecies trusted to them. We must now use them for our eternal life, to make use of them for our salvation. Both of these men want to see us at the return of Jesus.

Part 3 – Confidence in the Scriptures

A Last Will and Testament is composed of three things: A testator, a property or bequeathment, and an executor. The Apostles Peter and Paul are the testators, testifying with their very lives the veracity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are leaving to us two great prophecies, that of the great apostasy and the final coming of Jesus. But it is that third portion that in some ways is most precious of all: the identity and proclamation of the Executor.

We might consider how hard it would have been to be brethren in the churches of the first century. They were being faced with persecution of unheard of levels; of this time Jesus said “there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will” (Matt. 24:21). So how hard it had to be to face the end of the lives of the apostles, for not only were they losing these great men, but they were losing leaders of their churches (Peter an elder, Paul an evangelist). Additionally, with the departure of the apostles they were losing the precious miraculous gifts that only the Apostles could distribute.

With such sad conditions, we see that the departure of these apostles was one in which they reassured us that the Executor of the things of God would not depart, indeed would never depart (John 14:16). This Executor would make sure that the message of the Apostles was not lost, was perfected and gave them all that they needed. This Executor was not the church, but the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence..... 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

In these key passages to the point of the letters both apostles made clear that their messages, and all of the messages that comprise the New Testament (In 2 Peter 3:16 Peter calls Paul’s writings “Scripture”, while in 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul calls the Gospel accounts Scripture) are inspired by God and are complete and perfect.

Being God- Breathed (Inspired) is a special idea to Peter and Paul. They are telling us that the authorship is not man, but God. Indeed, inspired implies that the Holy Spirit is MANIFESTED in the Scriptures; thus everything the Holy Spirit does for us is through Scriptures. Additionally, if the Scriptures are the manifestation of God today, they cannot be destroyed or altered any more than God can be destroyed or altered. As well, we do not need the Holy Spirit to understand them (as many teach), because Scriptures ARE the Holy Spirit working in us!

Just as important in the idea of inspiration is that rejecting them is the same as rejecting God. Consider how we are often told that we will be judged by God/the Scriptures (John 12:48). If we don’t listen to the Word of God, then simply put, we won’t hear God. Consider the final statement in the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16:31; nothing can be superior to the Scriptures in the testimony of God. Jesus said that if we do not listen to the Apostles (the human agents of the New Testament Scriptures) we are not listening to Him and to the One who sent Him (John 13:20).

Just as important to the idea of inspiration is the idea of the thorough nature of the Scriptures. Peter and Paul both made it clear that the Scripture would thorough equip for every work of a Christian or of the church. That is important for two reasons. First, it tells us that all answers to all questions will be found ONLY in the Scriptures. Second, that means that no other revelation is necessary; nothing else will come from God, and any claims otherwise ARE NOT FROM GOD.

CONCLUSION

"A will or testament is a legal document by which a person, the testator, expresses their wishes as to how their property is to be distributed at death, and names one or more persons, the executor, to manage the estate until its final distribution"

The Letters of 2 Peter and 2 Timothy parallel each other in being the last will and testament of two of the most influential men in history. They each contain the three elements of a will: a testator; an inheritance, and an Executory. The testimony of Peter and Paul at the end of their lives is to the Gospel of Christ. Their gift are two precious and important prophecies: that many will fall away from the truth (but we can remain faithful) and that Jesus will come one day in judgment for all. The Executor of the will is the Holy Spirit Himself, who has inspired this message, and has told us that God's truth has been once and for all delivered.