

To God Alone Be The Glory

When wise people die, they leave a will. “Will” is short for “last will and testament.” A will is a way of saying, “These are the things I want to happen to my stuff when I die (this is my will, my final wish), and these are the things I want my loved ones to hear (this is my testament, my witness)” — a last will and testament. Occasionally you’ll find a will in which the deceased gives a piece of their mind to their relatives for wrongs that were not redressed. Of course, it’s usually better to work out such things while you’re still alive. That way you can leave a message of love and comfort for your survivors — an affectionate testament. And if you will them some of your possessions, your people can have a remembrance of you in years to come.

Jesus instituted his Holy Supper the night before he died. Our Lord Jesus intended his Supper to be his last will and testament for us. In it he wills us his precious possessions of forgiveness and eternal life, and he comforts us with a loving testament — A MESSAGE TO REMEMBER. Since Christ’s last will and testament is intended to console, comfort, and encourage us, doesn’t it make sense that we treasure it as a priceless gift and participate in it often?

But how often? Did you ever wonder? As a teen I wanted to know how often I

should receive Holy Communion. So I asked. And I couldn’t get a definite answer out of my pastor. That’s because he wanted to remain faithful to God’s Word. He showed me the words in the translation of the Bible we used to use. There it was: “*Do this, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.*” “See?” he said. “Often.” Jesus didn’t specify an exact number, perhaps because he didn’t want us to think of ‘going to Holy Communion’ as a good work, as though, if you go a thousand times, you get a golden ticket: “Admit One at the Pearly Gates.” At the same time, “often” is certainly more than “seldom.” Our current translation doesn’t communicate this as clearly as the old did. It says: “*Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.*” The word “whenever” could sound like “not very often.” But in the New Testament the Greek word for “*whenever*” actually means “*as often as.*” Jesus wants us to repeat the Lord’s Supper more than a few times in our lives.

Is there any other way for us to know that, say, once a year isn’t enough? Oh, yes. In the Greek language there are two ways to say, “Do this.” One emphasizes the doing: “Get it done, make it happen.” The other way of saying “Do this” is used when you want to communicate a regular pattern of behavior: “Keep on doing this.” Guess which way Jesus said “*Do this in*

remembrance of me”: yep, the second. “Do this again and again.” In the early church the Christians met almost daily to receive the Lord’s Supper. If you want to receive Holy Communion every day, that’s not too often. It’s impossible to become super-saturated with it.

But it is possible to receive the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy way. In the verses after our text, Paul says, ²⁷“Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.... ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.” Did those words ever scare you? Doesn’t it sound like you will go to hell if you receive Communion in an unworthy manner? I know Christians with very sensitive consciences. They are so afraid of receiving the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner, they refuse to receive it at all.

That’s too bad, because Paul wasn’t trying to scare us away from the Lord’s Table. But he did want us believers to prepare for Holy Communion. He wanted us to realize that if we are not sorry for our sins, then we have not acknowledged why Jesus shed his blood and died for us. It’s like saying, “I want to take Communion, but I don’t need a Savior.” It’s like saying, “I can keep doing what God says is wrong. I don’t

have to change. I don’t even have to want to change.” Going to the Lord’s Table with such attitudes definitely constitutes “*an unworthy manner*.” On the other hand, those who have a godly attitude will say, “By Jesus’ sacrifice he has declared me worthy. Since I am forgiven, I will now fight against the sinful temptations in my life.”

Instead of fretting about how you’re receiving the Lord’s Supper, think about what you’re receiving, and who is giving it to you, and the words he uses in delivering the Supper to you. Jesus teaches, “This is my body which I gave to remove your sins. This is the blood I poured out in order to cleanse you.” Could anyone speak more tenderly and friendly than Jesus?

What an excellent last will and testament Jesus included us in! Through his Supper our dear Lord wants to keep our knowledge and our faith alive, so that we do not die spiritually. The Supper is a perpetual reminder of Jesus’ death through which we were freed from sin and every kind of eternal misery. That’s why Jesus eagerly wants this remembering to take shape in our ears, on our mouths, and in our hearts. He wants us to ponder his holy sufferings. He fondly desires that this knowledge remain in the hearts of his Christians from generation to generation. That’s why the most important task of adults is to instruct the

young about the Redeemer. That's why Christians encourage young people and each other to come together for public worship services.

In the Lord's Supper Jesus comes to each individual and says, "I didn't just take away the sins of my apostles Peter and Paul. I didn't die for the sins of only the sinful woman and my own mother. I forgive you." When the full impact of that truth hits home, it is impossible for any sin to trouble your conscience. So if a sin is still troubling your conscience, then keep coming to the Lord's Supper so that his love can have the maximum impact for soothing your conscience into peace. "*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:1). What a priceless gift the Lord's Supper is to us individuals!

Christ's Supper is also a priceless gift to our church: it preserves and strengthens our congregation's unity in faith. That is why the Supper is also called Holy Communion. 'Communion' happens when you 'have something in common' or 'have a common union.' Through the Lord's Supper Jesus intends to hold his flock together.

The early Church Fathers (100s-200s) thought of a beautiful analogy to teach this point. In order to make bread you use grain. Each little grain has its own body and form. Yet the many grains

can be joined together to make one unified batch of dough. In the same way, every human is an individual, a unique creation. Nevertheless, when we individuals partake of wafers in the Sacrament from the same batch of dough, we are one bread, we are one body. Taking Communion together is like claiming we all have the same faith, the same confession, the same love, the same hope. You can draw a similar analogy from the wine. It is made from many grapes, each unique and individual. But as soon as they are pressed together, there is no internal variation in the wine, but a single, elegant, attractive liquid. Just so, each of us is not to remain a grape until himself, with her own unique doctrines, or his own separate life, or her own agenda. We are one church. We are in this together. Our Savior Jesus wants us to have unity.

The devil hates our unity. How tirelessly he works to tear this unity to shreds! He knows too well what kind of loss it would generate for him if we all hold to the same faith and rely on Christ. That's why he goes after one here and another there. Sow a little false doctrine with this one. Raise doubts in that one's mind. Lead this one to covet something God doesn't want Christians to have. Tempt that one to be dissatisfied with how God is running her life. Persuade this one with a little worldly propaganda. Bolster that

one's self-confidence to the point where he thinks he ought to run the show. Get this one to feel resentment toward that one. | Realizing all these evil plans Satan has in store for us can help us as a congregation eagerly desire the Lord's Supper for strengthening our unity.

We need this Supper, because we have a preacher living with us. This preacher sticks close by all day and all night. It is called the sinful flesh, and it's a master of perseverance. Think of how it repeatedly tugs at your attention until you become so interested in a certain sin or so tired of avoiding a sinful short cut that you forget all about Christ for a while. Even if you come to church to hear God's messages three times in one week, that scoundrel will still keep tugging at your thoughts until your mind drifts away from godly thinking. Your sinful flesh won't get tired of preaching rebellion, until you give in and take the plunge into sin.

By our Lord's Supper he can rescue us and turn all this around. When he causes us to remember his death for us, this can kindle in our hearts a fire that burns off the desire to sin. How helpful it is to pray, "O dear Lord, I can't stop sinning no matter how hard I try. And my flesh never seems to grow weary of advocating for sin. Please help me become hostile to my sinful flesh. Give me a love and a longing for you."

Do you know what I mean by a longing? What if instead of giving out the Lord's body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine, we started giving out \$1000 savings bonds. Just think how our attendance at the Lord's Supper would increase, not to mention how our outreach program would look like it had become outwardly successful. People would be crowding and pushing and shoving just to have a place to stand in our church. Martin Luther wrote about this idea, "Blind men might even dare to swim across rivers and streams in order to get their hands on the loot." Our sinful flesh is too sluggish and lazy to want eternal blessings—but it is eager to wrap itself up in the things of this world. Well, here in the Lord's Supper there are no savings bonds (which would soon be frittered away on temporary happiness anyway). Instead, the Savior bonds us to himself through his very body and blood. Here is the sure hope of everlasting life. That's why Jesus wants us to receive his Supper so often.

Lord, give us the proper love for your Supper and help us remember its message of forgiveness and unity.