



Truth

On Tough Texts

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A MINISTRY OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

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The Sealing of the Holy Spirit (2)

Ephesians 1:13–14

LAST MONTH WE BEGAN A STUDY OF ONE of the most important doctrines of what theologians call “Soteriology,” that is, the doctrine of salvation. As mentioned there, this doctrine is sadly neglected, both in theology books and the pulpit, and the tragic result is a misunderstanding of what the Holy Spirit actually accomplishes at salvation and the security that therefore results. We began our first division (The *Reality* of Sealing) of two by discussing the *meaning* of sealing—**ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise** (Eph. 1:13). We conclude with three other principles and then our second division (The *Results* of Sealing).

The Method of Sealing

By this we mean who exactly is the one who seals us. All three of the passages we have mentioned make it clear that sealing is accomplished entirely by God. Just like the Baptism of the Spirit, we are never exhorted to be sealed. Sealing is the work of God from start to finish.

It is also important to note that the verse reads “**with the Holy Spirit**,” not “*by the Holy Spirit*.” This indicates that the Holy Spirit is the *seal* not the *sealer*. It is God the Father who does the sealing. He is the “lumber merchant,” while the Holy Spirit is the “merchant’s signet.” Second Corinthians 1:21-22 bears this out:

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest [guarantee] of the Spirit in our hearts.

We also should note that the definite article (“the”) appears before **promise**, so the idea is that we **were**

sealed with that holy Spirit of [the] promise. This, of course, refers to the Lord Jesus’ promise to send His Spirit (Jn. 14:16; Jn. 16:7-14; Acts 1:4, 8). So **the Holy Spirit** was *sent*; He was sent to do certain tasks that would glorify Christ. One of those tasks was to be God’s Seal upon the purchased possession.

To illustrate, I recall the days when my father-in-law owned and operated a little country store where he would buy food items in bulk and package them for resale. One item he carried was cheese, in various varieties, which he would buy in large blocks and then cut to a customer’s wishes. To preserve some blocks for aging purposes (and, oh, how good is a 12-year-old sharp cheddar!) he would seal a block in wax. So in that case the *substance* of the seal was wax, and it was my father-in-law who did the actual *act* of sealing. Likewise, God the Father has done the sealing with (or, by means of) the Spirit.

Another modern illustration is when you go down to the store and buy a large item, such as an appliance, you receive a piece of paper called a “Guarantee.” This is the manufacture’s promise of quality. Infinitely deeper, the Holy Spirit is God’s guarantee of quality. And we can also be thankful that God’s guarantee is not just 90 days parts and labor, but is forever.

To summarize: First, the Father is the *Sealer*; second, the Holy Spirit is the *Seal*; third, Christ is the *Strength* of the seal (as He is the One who sent the Spirit and the One whose work made the Spirit’s indwelling possible); fourth, the believer is the *Sealed*.

The Measure of Sealing

The main point we need to make here is that the sealing of the Holy Spirit is *universal among believers*. Some claim that they have had “an experience” that confirmed their sealing and that sealing is not necessarily true of every Christian. But there are three very plain proofs that *all* believers are sealed.

First, II Corinthians 1:21–22 declares that even the Corinthians were sealed. The Corinthians were not as carnal when Paul wrote his second letter as they were when he wrote his first, but they were still a carnal lot indeed. Paul, however, makes no exception; even in their carnality, the Corinthians were sealed. The same thing is true of the “baptism of the Spirit;” the Corinthians were not exempt from this either, as we noted earlier.

How we need to grasp the truth that the acts of sealing and baptism are the work of God! It is tragic, indeed, that so many Christians today live in a constant need of “experience.” Our salvation is not based on how we feel or what we have experienced, rather on what God has done. It is based upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary, and the assurance of that is based upon the indwelling, sealing power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, there is no Scripture exhortation to be sealed. This is a strong indication that sealing is universal. If sealing were not universal, then surely God would command us to seek it. There is no believer who knows how to go about “getting sealed” simply because there is no instruction on how to do it. *Sealing has nothing to do with experience*; it is a work that God accomplishes. In contrast, we *are* commanded to be “filled” (controlled) by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), as this is a repeated experience. But we are never told to be either sealed or baptized.

Third, Ephesians 4:30 exhorts us not to grieve the Holy Spirit by whom we are sealed. It is obvious here that Paul’s attitude is that he assumes all believers are sealed. Remember, Paul is writing to all believers, so he says here to all those sealed believers that they should not grieve (sadden) the Holy Spirit. If only “spiritual people” were sealed, Paul’s exhortation would make no sense. He would then be saying “do not grieve the Holy Spirit” to people who were already grieving the Holy Spirit.

We say again, *all* believers are sealed. Right in line with this is our fourth principle.

The Moment of Sealing

It is essential to recognize that *sealing occurs at the moment of salvation*. Again, there are those who maintain that sealing occurs sometime after salvation. This view, in fact, is quite troubling. The great expositor Martyn Lloyd-Jones is one of my personal heroes. His book on preaching (*Preaching and Preachers*) is unmatched on that subject and is greatly needed in our day. In my

humble opinion, however, his otherwise stellar teaching was marred by his weakness on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. With the deepest respect, I must say that his muddled (sometimes almost mystical) views on sealing, indwelling, infilling, and baptism (*God’s Ultimate Purpose*, pp. 243-311 and other works) opened the door wide for errant charismatic teaching. It’s undoubtedly significant that soon after his departure from Westminster Chapel in London, that church went the way of the charismatic Vineyard Movement.

Mystical ideas about sealing violate the simple purpose of this act, which is to be a guarantee. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee that we are genuine. Further, there are no New Testament examples of a person being sealed at some time subsequent to salvation. There are instances of people being *filled*, but not sealed. While Lloyd-Jones, for example, discusses several Scriptures as “proof” (pp. 250-254), *not one of them mentions sealing by name*. It’s amazing and tragic that one so solid in his overall Theology was so confused about the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, the statement, “I am suggesting therefore that the ‘baptism of the Spirit’ is the same as the ‘sealing with the Spirit’” (p. 264), reveals some very serious misunderstanding.

The main cause of this misunderstanding is the failure to examine the Greek text (again, something that Lloyd-Jones usually did not fail to do). The construction of the verb **believed** is the aorist participle in the Greek.¹ This actually shows *cause* more than it does *time*. In other words, believing is what *caused* the sealing. Therefore, both happened at the same time. The literal translation of this is, “in whom also having believed, ye were sealed.”

This is not an isolated case of this Greek construction. Another example appears in Acts 1:8: “Ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you.” Again, “is come” is the aorist participle showing cause; that is, receiving power is caused by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Literally the verse reads, “Ye shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you.”

We must also add, not only does sealing occur at the moment of salvation, it also happens once-for-all and forever. For example, a letter is designed to be sealed only once. Likewise, down through the centuries a seal of any kind was designed to be used only once. This has always been the value of a seal and is the case with God’s seal; it has been given once-for-all. As mentioned earlier, all three references to sealing in the New Testament are aorist tense (punctiliar action in the past). But, in addition, Ephesians 4:30 says we are sealed (once-for-all) “unto the day of redemption.” This refers to our final redemption, which is yet future. What redemption is this? Romans 8:23 tells us: “We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body.” Back in verse 5 we learn

that we are “predestined” to final adoption, which is yet future. Now we see that redemption not only involves the present (in that Christ’s blood was the purchase price for our redemption), but that redemption also involves our going to be with the Lord in glory.

II. The Results of Sealing (v. 14)

Who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.

How marvelous verse 14 is! We’ve seen that sealing pictures acquisition, absolute ownership, and authenticity. But the most significant picture of sealing is *assurance* (security). If I may, I say again that I have found no other principle more assuring to salvation than this doctrine. Verse 14 teaches two results of sealing, both of which having to do with security.

Sealing Secures Our Inheritance

One of the saddest realities in Christianity today is the fact that many deny the Biblical doctrine of the security of the believer. This doctrine has been called “that damnable doctrine that gives people license to sin.” It is argued, “If you are eternally secure, you can go out and live any way you want to and just ask God to forgive you.” But this doctrine says no such thing, for anyone who has that idea of salvation cannot possibly be a Christian. Salvation involves a new person, a new creature in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). We no longer live the way we once did.

But this verse tells us exactly where our security lies—in the Holy Spirit. We might be forced to agree with those who deny security if it were not for the Holy Spirit. But our text tells us that He is the **earnest** of our inheritance. That wonderful word **earnest** is *arrabōn*, a word that came into the Greek from Phoenician traders and means “first installment, down payment, deposit.”

It’s interesting to note that this was more than just a mere “pledge,” as it is translated in the Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims translation and the Revised Standard Version. That mistranslation was the result of the inaccurate and often corrupt Latin Vulgate’s use of the word *pignus* (pledge),² which is not the equivalent of the Greek *arrabōn*. This earnest is not just a *pledge* or *promise*; it’s actually a *portion* of the inheritance, the first installment. As one commentator puts it, “The earnest, in short, is the inheritance in miniature.”³

So it was that this term was used in secular Greek as a legal term in business and trade; it was with this advance payment that a contract became lawfully valid and binding. In fact, we have this term “earnest money” even today. The same Greek word is used in modern Greek for an engagement ring; it is more than just a promise to marry; it is the first installment of the coming marriage.

Now let us couple this thought with a deeper look at the word **inheritance**. This is the same basic word as back in verse 11—“In [Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance.” The literal sense of the Greek *klēros* is “a lot” (as in “casting lots”). The word then came to mean “a share,” “a plot of land,” and finally “an inheritance.” What then is our inheritance?—*the salvation described in verses 3–14*. Most of us have viewed our future inheritance as pots of gold sitting in various places throughout our heavenly mansion, but that is because our minds have been polluted by the world’s ideas of wealth. Our true inheritance is the salvation Paul has been describing, and *the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of that salvation*. Just as “earnest money” is binding and not returnable, the Holy Spirit is not withdrawn from the believer; He is God’s deposit, God’s *first installment* of eternal salvation.

There has been much confusion and question about the sealing of the Holy Spirit in past years, but we must honestly ask, “Why?” How could anything be clearer? We first see all we have in Christ in verses 3–14, and then we see that the Holy Spirit is the promise, the guarantee, and the first installment of that salvation. What more could Paul have said to make it plainer? Those who reject the security of the believer must either ignore or willingly reject the plain analogy that Paul gives here. If someone can see that God has given us the first installment of our inheritance, that He has given us the down payment of glory, that He has given us the deposit of what is to come, but still think that we can lose all that, they are to be pitied indeed.

We, of course, are the purchased possession (v. 7), and our final redemption is yet future (Rom. 8:23). Therefore, we are absolutely secure in the knowledge of our future home in heaven. We not only have eternal salvation in the here and now, but this salvation is also going to usher us right into the redemption of the body, the final redemption of the purchased possession.

Dear Christian, can we ever lose our salvation? Absolutely not! Why? Because we have been sealed with “God’s earnest money”—His indwelling Holy Spirit. Does that thought cause us to clap our hands in glee that we can now live any way we want? On the contrary, it ignites a humble submission and holiness of life.

Sealing Secures God’s Possession

Not only is *our inheritance* in view in verse 14, but so is *God’s possession*. Paul declares, **until the redemption of the purchased possession**. The word **possession** translates the Greek *peripoiēsis*, which speaks of gaining possession of property for one’s self. To review one of our earlier illustrations (Part 1), when the lumber merchant went to Ephesus, he purchased his timber and placed his seal upon it so that it would come directly to him and no one else. Likewise, we are God’s purchased

possession and His Seal (the Holy Spirit) secures that purchase and brings it directly to Him.

Finally, Paul closes by reminding us once again of God's ultimate purpose. While the spiritual riches God has given us are awesome, indeed, and while it is all guaranteed by God's down payment in the person of the Holy Spirit, that is not the primary purpose. Why is God bringing us to Himself? The answer is: it is all **unto the praise of his glory**. There is that marvelous phrase once again; this is the third and the most glorious usage in this passage; it culminates the entire passage. As Isaiah declared: "My people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise" (Is. 43:20-21). Yes, that speaks specifically of Israel, but God also "did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14), and so we too are His elect, His chosen, and we shall "show forth His praise."

We are reminded here of God's ultimate purpose as outlined in Ephesians 1: *to restore the unity between God and man so that man can glorify Him*. God did not save us primarily for our benefit, but rather saved us so we could praise Him. Let us never forget that truth!

Oh, is it not wonderful to know we are sealed? Man's seals can be broken. I used to hear my father say, "Locks

only keep the honest people out." How true, for if someone wants into a place bad enough he will get in. But God's Seal will not and cannot be broken.

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NOTES

¹ For a detailed explanation, see A. T. Roberson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 520-525. We would briefly mention the Greek case "locative of sphere." Basically, "locative" (Latin *locus*) speaks of "local" or "location." The "locative of sphere" then indicates the sphere, realm, or location in which something or some one exists. So, the words "in Whom . . . ye believed" show the location of belief.

² John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998; reprint of 2nd Edition, 1861), p. 67.

³ Eadie, p. 68.

Never has the church had more wire stretched with less power in it. All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down. Sad to say, we seem not even to know that we have not the Spirit in power. If He ceased His work, many church members would never know the difference. Like Sampson, we wist not that He has departed, but we keep "shaking ourselves" in the prescribed calisthenics.

*Vance Havner
Hearts Afire (1952)*

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