

Bethany Bible Church; AM Bible Study; February 14, 2018
The Holy Spirit—Our Helper; Lesson 17; His Sealing

SEALED BY THE SPIRIT

Theme: The Spirit's ministry of 'sealing' secures us permanently for many blessings in Christ.

*“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it,
seal it for thy courts above.”¹*

Those lines from that great old hymn *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing* capture the subject of this morning's lesson wonderfully well. In it, we will be taking up a ministry of the Holy Spirit for which we should be—and will be!—grateful eternally; that is, His ministry of 'sealing' the believer. It should be seen as something that falls under the greater theme we have been studying most recently—the 'baptism' of the Spirit; and it is, in fact, a consequence of that ministry.

Like the Spirit's ministry of spiritually and positionally baptizing the believer into permanent spiritual union with Jesus Christ and with the church that He has redeemed, the Spirit's 'sealing' ministry is also a non-experiential ministry. By that, we mean that it is something that is true of all believers; and is true whether an individual believer 'feels' it or not. The doctrine of the Spirit's sealing means that, through His ministry of 'baptism', the Holy Spirit forever preserves us and secures us into that in which He has also baptized us.

Now; you may remember that we've already touched on this to some degree. Back in our sixth lesson on the Holy Spirit ("The Spirit's Ministry in 'Type'"), we considered how the Holy Spirit was biblically pictured to us in the symbolic 'type' or representation of "a seal"—that is, and imprint or wax impression on a document. At that time, we explained what such a 'seal' meant by saying, "In the Old Testament, a written transaction was completed—and the thing deeded was secured for future redemption—by a seal (see Jeremiah 32:9-10). The presence of an official seal had the effect of completely settling the matter (see 1 Kings 21:8; Esther 8:7-8). It was used as a figure of speech for the possessiveness of love in Song of Solomon 8:6—'set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm ...'"

The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit is just such a 'seal' upon the believer. And in this lesson, through three key New Testament passages, we learn more about the Spirit's precious sealing ministry upon us as God's redeemed people.

The Bible presents the Spirit's sealing ministry as ...

I. THE GUARANTEE OF OUR FUTURE GLORIFICATION.

A. In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers about his ministry; and said,

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee

(2 Corinthians 1:21-22).²

Of what, exactly is the Holy Spirit a guarantee? Well; in the previous verses, Paul talked about the suffering he and his co-workers endured for the gospel—a suffering so great that they willingly took upon themselves the sentence of death and even despaired of life. And in verses 10-11, he said,

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us (vv. 10-11).

Paul drew confidence in his hope for a full deliverance—even a deliverance from death and unto resurrection—from the fact of that he, his co-workers, and the Corinthian believers all bore the seal of the Holy Spirit. The confidence this gave him was very great indeed; because, as he said, “all the promises of God in Him [that is, in Jesus Christ] are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (v. 20). So, the Spirit is being seen here as a seal that guarantees full resurrection and future glorification.

- B. Two important Greek words are used in the above passage from 2 Corinthians 1:21-22. The first is *arrabon*—a word that is here translated “seal”. The other word is *bebaiosis*--translated “guarantee” (which can also be translated “confirmation”). In the context of this passage, these are ideas taken from the everyday world of the marketplace. As one Bible commentator put it, “In Greek classical times a *bebaiosis* was a seller’s guarantee to a buyer that as money had been paid the goods would be forthcoming, and the *arrabon*, a deposit promising that full payment would be made. In this imagery, as adapted by Paul, God is the ‘guarantor,’ and God also pays the ‘deposit’ (the Spirit).”³ As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:4-5,

For we who are in this tent [that is, this body] groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee [arrabon] (2 Corinthians 5:4-5).

What a great truth this is telling us! Because of the Holy Spirit’s ministry of sealing us—serving as God’s divine “deposit”—how can we ever fail to be resurrected and glorified in Christ?

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Now; the Bible also presents the Spirit’s sealing ministry to us as ...

II. THE IDENTIFYING MARK THAT WE ARE GOD’S POSSESSION.

- A. Not only do we have something to look forward to in God; but God Himself has something to look forward to in us! In the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul marvelously describes the ministry of all three members of the Trinity in our salvation. And in Ephesians 1:13-14, we read,

In Him [that is, in Christ] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed [sphragizo; ‘set apart by a mark] with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee [arrabon; ‘the deposit’] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:13-14).

It might seem a bit confusing to find these different Greek words intermingled into the texts we’re quoting; but they’re important in helping us rightly understand the Spirit’s ministry of sealing. In this passage from Ephesians (as also in 2 Corinthians 1:22), the word *arrabon* is used. But in this case, it is translated by the word “guarantee”. And the word that is here translated “sealed” is *sphragizo*—which means “to set apart or secure by a mark or an imprint”.

- B. Here, rather than the imagery of the marketplace, the imagery of notarization is being used. The Holy Spirit’s permanent presence in us serves as an official mark, as if on a document—such as a letter, a contract, or a deed. In ancient times, such a contract was closed and sealed by a wax seal that bore the imprint of an official. The document, thus officially sealed, became a “guarantee”—set apart or secured by the seal—that secured what was deeded to the owner. Here, the Holy Spirit is presented to us as both God’s official seal upon us, and the official guarantee to us that we truly belong to God as His property—keeping us set apart for Him “until the redemption of the purchased possession”.
- C. Now; it’s certainly true that—as the Bible teaches us—we receive a rich eternal inheritance with Christ. And the Spirit serves as a guarantee of that future inheritance of ours as well (see 1 Peter 1:3-5). But it was not *we* who purchased *ourselves* for this. Rather, it was the Father who purchased us through the blood of His Son, and who put His seal upon us as His purchased possession. Christ Himself has an inheritance in us! In Ephesians 1:18, Paul prays that—among other things—we may know “what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” Our presence with our Lord Jesus forever is “the joy that was set before Him” that motivated Him to endure the cross on our behalf (Hebrews 12:2). It is the prospect for which He prayed to the Father with great desire (John 17:24). This means that we are sure to receive a share in Christ’s inheritance forever, because we ourselves are the inheritance which He Himself is sure to receive! We are “sealed” by God for this through the Holy Spirit. And praise Him!—a seal of God is something that no creature can ever break! We are marked out as His on this earth—and we will stay His until the day He claims us! What security we have!

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And finally, the Bible presents the Spirit’s sealing ministry to us as ...

III. OUR MOTIVATION TO ‘PUT OFF’ THE SINS OF THE PAST.

A. In Ephesians 4:29-30—in a very practical portion of his letter—Paul wrote,

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed [sphragizo] for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:29-30).

You're probably getting used to seeing Greek words in this lesson now; and the word that Paul uses here for "seal" is the one we were introduced to in Ephesians 1:13—*sphragizo*; which, as we suggested, means "to set apart or secure by a mark or an imprint". And here, we're told that we are set apart secured—"marked out, as it were—for the 'day of redemption'. That 'day of redemption' is a reference to the future resurrection and glorification of our bodies. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:23; "we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

B. In this case, rather than that of the marketplace or of the notary public's office, the imagery of betrothal is being used. So, in Ephesians 4:29-30, that which sets us apart is the Holy Spirit—a divine Person who serves as God's identifying 'engagement ring' upon us; marking us out as the betrothed bride of His Son. Paul was very jealous for his brothers and sisters in Christ; because, as he said with regard to his gospel ministry to them, "I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). And so, Paul urged his fellow believers to make sure that their conduct and manner of speech, as those who are destined to be presented to Christ as His glorious bride, was not a grief to the Holy Spirit by whom they were set apart as God's property for that great day. We're to behave now in these bodies like what the seal of the Holy Spirit upon us guarantees that we will one day be. As the apostle John tells us,

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

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The motivation to put off the sins of the past! The identifying mark that we belong to God through Jesus! The sure and certain guarantee that we will—one day—be fully glorified with Jesus! What great blessings are ours through the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit!

Where would we be without what He does for us! How sure we can be of our destiny because He does it all for us so faithfully!

¹From "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing", by Robert Robinson (1735-1790). Public Domain.

²All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

³Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to The Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), p. 110, n. 43.