

Assurance

OUR SEAL & PLEDGE

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Assurance: Our Seal and Pledge

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Foreword

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Titus 2:11-15, KJV).

What does it mean to be a “peculiar people?” Today we often associate this word with such terms as *strange*, *weird* or *odd*. This incorrect connotation makes it hard to understand just what type of people Christians are supposed to be.

The meaning of the word *peculiar* has changed significantly since the days of King James. Originally it meant to be set apart—to be reserved for something special. This passage teaches that, as a “peculiar” people, we are being called apart by Christ to live a different life.

I have sought to explore some of the peculiar characteristics of the Christian life in this booklet—characteristics which mark believers with an indelible stamp identifying them as God’s possession. It is our prayer that these materials will guide you into a deeper understanding of your position as His special treasure.

Introduction

How does one know for sure that he will spend eternity in God's presence? That is an issue of personal faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. If you have come to believe that Jesus the Son of God died for your sins and rose again from the dead, then you will spend eternity with Him in heaven.

But then, what if you have done that? How can you know for sure that you will arrive in His presence safely? Is it possible to fall out along the way—to rebel to the extent that you are closed out of the family? In other words, *Is it possible for a believer to lose his salvation?*

I want to say at the beginning that I believe the Christian is secure in his salvation in Christ. He is secure not because of his own faithfulness, but because of God's; not because of his own work, but because of the Spirit's work. I am confident that those of you who believe in Jesus Christ will one day arrive at the New Jerusalem along with me, but I have no confidence in *your* faithfulness or power. Nor do I have confidence in my *own* faithfulness. If it depended upon me, I would have been saved and lost so many times you could not count them! But since it depends upon the Spirit of God, I have confidence because I know He is adequate and able.

Two verses in the New Testament, Ephesians 1:13, 14, focus our attention on the crucial ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. He is our seal and pledge. Through Him and His work we can have security in our salvation and be confident in our ultimate redemption.

The Godhead and Our Salvation

Beginning with Ephesians 1:3, the Apostle Paul develops the role of the Trinity in the salvation of the believer. In verses 3 through 6 he talks about the work of God the Father. He is the One Who “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (v.3), and who “chose us in Him” (v.4). In verse 5, He is the One Who “predestined us.” So He blessed us, He chose us, He predestined us—all referring to the work of God the Father.

In Ephesians 1:7—12, Paul talks about the work of the Son. As you might expect, the fuller development of our salvation comes through the ministry of Jesus Christ. He is the One Who has redeemed us and made us an inheritance for God. Ephesians 1:7 begins, “In Him we have redemption.” Though our redemption was planned and carried out by God the Father, its accomplishment centers in the Person and Work of God the Son, Jesus Christ. He is the One Who redeemed us “through His blood.” He is the One Who also made us an inheritance to God. “Also we have obtained an inheritance” in Ephesians 1:11 could perhaps be better translated, “We have been made an inheritance.” We have become God’s own special possession as a result of the finished work of Christ.

Thus Ephesians 1:13 and 14 come into play with the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit. We have become God’s possession through the death and resurrection of His Son. The Holy Spirit’s ministry is one of securing us and keeping us until the day of our ultimate redemption and glorification in the presence of the Father.

The Seal of the Spirit

Ephesians 1:13, 14 reads: “In Him [Christ], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Paul builds to the fact of our sealing by describing the process by which it has been accomplished:

“After listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed.” There are two participles here, *listening* and *having believed*. The King James version has this translated in a rather confusing way, so that some might be led to think you are sealed sometime *after* you believe: “In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed.” Actually, “Upon believing, you were sealed” would be a more accurate translation.

The basis for our sealing is the hearing of the truth, the Word of God. Note how Paul clearly identifies the message he is talking about: “The message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” In other words, the message of truth is the Gospel of our salvation. It is the Good News of Jesus Christ. These Gentiles in Ephesus had heard the message of redemption, that the Son of God came to earth and secured redemption by His own death and resurrection.

Hearing and Believing—“Having also believed” (Eph.1:13). Here you see two facts that are always joined together: Those who *hear* must also *believe*. Romans 10:17 tells us that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.” In order for a person to experience eternal redemption, he must hear the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not possible to be saved any other way. That is why men and women and young people must hear the Gospel, because unless they hear it, they cannot believe it. And unless they believe it, they cannot be saved.

So we come to the main point: “After listening . . . having also believed, *you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise*” (emphasis added). This sealing is presented in the aorist tense as an accomplished fact—you *were* sealed. Furthermore, it is passive—it is something that was done to you. God sealed us; we did not seal ourselves. This is important because the argument often arises that, while “no one shall snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28), we

can still *jump* out! That may sound cute, but it is terrible theology. We did not seal ourselves; God sealed us. To accept this argument would be like sealing a letter inside an envelope only to be told, “Well, the letter opened the envelope and got out.” It does not happen that way!

As Christians we are sealed by the Father. He is the only authorized recipient. No one else has the authority or privilege of opening that seal. We are sealed for Him.

The Meaning of the Seal—I used to work for a company in the East, and part of my job at one time was to unload trucks. As the trucks came in, the first thing I did was check the seals on the doors to make sure they had not been tampered with. I also wrote down the numbers on the seals so they could be checked with those that had been secured when the truck left. This prevented someone from breaking the seal and covering it up by replacing it with another. The weight of the company stood behind its seal.

A seal signifies two things: ownership and security. The basic idea through it all is the security of the seal—it is guaranteed by the person doing the sealing. The reason the truck was sealed was to secure what was in it, to help guarantee its safe arrival at its ultimate destination. This demonstrates something of what God is doing when He seals us “in Him” (Eph. 1: 13).

The sealing takes place in Christ—the same “in Him” referred to at the beginning of Ephesians 1:13. God the Father sealed us in Christ *with* the Holy Spirit. All three persons of the Godhead are at work here. God the Father is the One who does the sealing. We are sealed in Christ, that is, only those in Christ are sealed; and we are sealed with the Holy Spirit when we hear and believe the Gospel. This is Paul’s message to the Ephesians: having heard, having believed, you were sealed. Every person who has believed in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior has been sealed by God the Father in Christ—in the same way items on a truck are sealed inside.

On our trucks we used metal seals, but in this case the seal is the Spirit of God Himself. God the Father has put his whole weight and authority behind the seal—a seal that is all-powerful. Even Satan, as powerful as he is, cannot break the seal, because “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Eternal Security and the Word—The doctrine of the security of

the believer is fundamental to the character of God. Without realizing it, those who reject the security of the believer attack the very character of God. Either we are sealed and God is true, or we are not sealed and His Word is false.

Two of the three references to the sealing of the believer are found in the Book of Ephesians. We have already examined one of these, Ephesians 1:13,14. The other two are Ephesians 4:30 and 2 Corinthians 1:22.

Ephesians 4:30 reads: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." This verse points out that the Spirit of God does not leave us when our conduct is out of character. He is grieved by our sin. Think about it: Every sin that you have ever committed since the day you trusted Christ has been committed in the presence of the Spirit of God Who indwells you. He has never left you. That is why Paul writes in verses 29 and 31: "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth" and "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." The Spirit of God is present through it all.

Those who say the doctrine of the security of the believer leads to a life of license have no ground to stand upon, for this passage implies just the opposite! Quite frankly, I think I would feel better about sinning if I thought the Holy Spirit of God went home when I sinned. Then I could sin without anyone knowing about it. I could always get down and cry and beg Him to come back later. But when you realize that the Spirit of God does not leave, that He is a permanent seal that has been placed upon you, then you cannot forget that any sin committed is committed in His presence. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). We ought to be careful with what we do with the temple of God. The Spirit of God resides here and is grieved by sin in the life of a believer.

An 'Unsealed' Believer?—While Romans 8:9 does not use the word *sealing*, it clearly refers to the fact: "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." Here you have the negative side. We have already seen that the presence of the Holy Spirit is God's seal upon the believer.

This passage tells us that anyone who does not have the Spirit of God is not a possession of God. He does not belong to God at all.

The Pledge of the Spirit

Ephesians 1:13 refers to the Holy Spirit as “the Holy Spirit of promise.” In Acts 1:4,5 He is spoken of as that which “the Father had promised.” During Christ’s earthly ministry, particularly in John 14:16, the Holy Spirit was promised to all believers.

In a slightly different vein, He is also the Spirit Who will bring about what has been promised to us. This idea is brought out in Ephesians 1:14. As the Holy Spirit of promise, He is the Spirit Who is connected with the fulfillment of what God has promised to us: the realization of glory in His presence. Note how this developed. The Holy Spirit of promise “is given as a pledge of our inheritance.” We are familiar with the word *pledge*. It means “down payment” or “earnest money.”

If I lust for any earthly thing, it probably lies in the realm of automobiles. Maybe it is just a passing enjoyment—I don’t know. It sounds better to call it “passing pleasure” than *lust*, doesn’t it! I have been looking at cars lately. I’ve made my tour of all the dealerships and test-driven all sorts of cars. Yesterday afternoon the salesman said to me: “Just write me a check. Just a little bit down and we will hold this little beauty for you.” (He only had 35 of them on the lot—sure wouldn’t want this one to get away!)

What was he asking for? Earnest money. A down payment. Something to secure that possession—to say, “Yes, I’ll take it. And here is my money.” The money serves as a promise that I will come through with the rest.

When you bought your house or car, you were asked for earnest money. What does earnest money indicate? That you will come through with the rest. That is exactly what God is saying in Ephesians 1:14. The Holy Spirit is given as a seal to guarantee our security and as a promise that He will come through with the rest. Who has given the down payment? God! And who is on the line to come through with the rest? God Himself!

Do you see why I am so confident that I will spend eternity in God’s presence? *He always comes through!* He put down the earnest money. He can be trusted to “pay up,” so to speak.

Present and Future Redemption—The Spirit of God is God’s down payment. He is the pledge of our inheritance. The Spirit is God’s guarantee that we will obtain our inheritance—that God’s own possession will be redeemed in His presence and will be secured for Himself. Now this much has been done, but I haven’t been taken to glory in His presence. How do I know I will get there? He has made the down payment that guarantees the inheritance.

Note how it is developed further in Ephesians 1:14: “With a view to the redemption of God’s own possession.” In other words, the Spirit is given to us as a down payment looking toward ultimate redemption when God will “close the deal.”

From God’s perspective our redemption has already been accomplished. Romans 8 develops that. But in actual realization, it has not been completed. I have not yet been glorified. Remember Ephesians 4:30, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed *for the day of redemption*” (emphasis added). When He saved me, He sealed me—and then He laid down a down payment so there would be no question of my assurance of redemption and glory in His presence.

If it is possible for a believer to lose his salvation, then God’s down payment is worthless. If a believer can lose his salvation, God’s seal is without value. He is the One who has obligated Himself. He didn’t say, “I’ll tell you what, I’ll give you something to get you started and then let’s see if you make it.” No, none of us would make it. But what did He say? “*I’ll do it all.*”

The phrase in Ephesians 1, “With a view to the redemption of God’s own possession” (v.14) is presented as the realization of this adoption in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” This temporal, transitory existence is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19).

The First Fruits—“For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:22, 23). We have

the “first fruits” of the Spirit. What do the first fruits signify? They represent the guarantee of a coming harvest. First Corinthians 15:20 tells us Jesus Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection. What did He do? He guaranteed the coming resurrection of all believers.

The Holy Spirit of God is the “first fruits” referred to here. We have the first fruits of the Spirit—as a down payment, if you will. The “redemption of the body” refers to our adoption as sons. We are sons of God *now*. Romans 8:15 tells us “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ ” But the full unveiling and acquisition of our positions as God’s children will occur when we are unveiled before all creation in glory as sons of God. That is our ultimate destiny. The Spirit of God is God’s down payment, God’s guarantee that this will occur.

Ephesians 1:13,14 is very concise—very much to the point. Essentially God says, “I have sealed you. I am the One Who chose you from before the foundation of the world. I have seen that your redemption was accomplished in the finished work of My Son, Who has sealed you with My Spirit and given Him as a down payment, looking forward to your ultimate redemption.” So I can be sure, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I am going to be glorified in the presence of God and enjoy His presence forever. It has been settled because God has given me His Spirit as a down payment.

Someone may ask, “Well, Gil, what if you get off the track?” Praise God, the Holy Spirit has sealed me! He is God’s down payment. God will surely chasten the wayward believer, but we can’t turn around and walk away. That is not an option He has given to us.

God provided the down payment. He is on the line. This security doesn’t make me want to go out and sin. It is a reminder to me that the Spirit of God who indwells me is the *Holy One* of God, and He is grieved by sin in my life. That makes me—in thanks and gratitude to God—want to live my life in a way that is pleasing to Him. I want to manifest in all my dealings the character of the One who indwells, that I might evidence the fact that I am destined for glory in His presence.

Afterword

There are two groups of people reading this book: those who have been sealed and those who have not. There are those who have God's down payment and there are those who do not. There is no security outside of Jesus Christ. The sequence of events is the same for you as it was for the Ephesians. You have heard the Word of Truth—the Gospel that unveils salvation. Jesus Christ died for you—a sinner. He was buried and rose again. If you will place your faith in Him, you will be forgiven, you will be redeemed and you will be sealed by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God will take up residence in your life as God's guarantee to you that one day in the future He will redeem and glorify your body.

Have you believed? The Ephesians, having heard, believed. Now that you have heard, will you do the same? The moment you believe, the Spirit will seal you and take up residence in your life as God's guarantee that you will enter into the inheritance that He has prepared for you and for all those who love Him.

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