

Building Biblical
COMMUNITY in CHRIST

What's so Great About Being a Christian?

Part IV

Ephesians 1:13-14

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:13-14

God's great desire for you and me is that we feel secure in his love and protection. Do you sense this security in your life? Many of you might have reason not to – at least from a human perspective. As I was praying over the prayer sheet this past week, I thought of this. Here are some of the requests:

- Pray for my cousin who is in jail for stealing a car;
- Pray for a full-time, steady job;
- I need a temporary residence this summer;
- My dad is in the other half of the world...I miss him!
- Pray for our time of financial struggle;

And the list goes on. There is probably not a person in this room who has not – at one time or another – felt like they were out on a ledge fifty stories up in an unpredictable wind. (There may be a few rare ones who like that feeling!) Many of you may feel that way this morning. The circumstances of your health, family, job, relationships, or finances are such that you feel yourself losing emotional, mental and spiritual balance and falling headlong into disaster. I personally have felt that way in recent months. There have been times when, facing the death of my Mom and son, I thought I was going over the edge.

The odd thing is that being a Christian does not make us immune to the rather tragic twists and turns of life. In fact, just the opposite is true. When you swore allegiance to Jesus Christ, you signed up for the most dangerous mission in the world. After all, was this not the experience of our captain and chief? On the cross he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you

forsaken me?” But in it all, God promises you and me security. I’ll say it again – *God’s great desire for you and me is that we feel secure in his love and protection.* And it is in the truth of these verses that you and I can find that sense of security.

So far in our study of Ephesians we have seen seven aspects of our spiritual wealth that help us understand why it is so great to be a Christian. Here they are in review:

1. We are *blessed* (1:3)
2. We are *chosen* (1:4)
3. We are *predestined* (1:5)
4. We are *adopted* (1:5)
5. We are *free* (1:7)
6. We have *understanding* (1:9)
7. We have an *inheritance* (1:11)

Now as we come to verses 13-14, we see another great benefit of being a Christian. It is this:

WE ARE SECURE (1:13-14)

The Father elects, the Son redeems and the Spirit seals. The Father *planned* our inheritance, the Son *purchased* our inheritance, but the Spirit *protects* our inheritance. In what way does the Spirit protect you and me? In these two verses Paul uses two words to describe how the Holy Spirit protects you and me, assuring us that we will receive all that God has promised. The first word is the term “seal” in verse 13. And the second is the word “deposit” in verse 14.

First, the Holy Spirit is our seal. Notice again what Paul says at the end of verse 13: *“Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit...”*

The Bible tells us there are many ministries of the Holy Spirit:

- (1) He convicts us before we become believers (John 16:8-11)
- (2) He gives us new birth (John 3:14-16)
- (3) He baptizes us, by placing us “in Christ” (1 Cor. 12:13)
- (4) He fills us to empower us to live for Christ (Eph 5:18)

But here, the Spirit “seals” us. What does this mean to be marked with the sealⁱ of the Holy Spirit? Lately I’ve been reading again the account of Joseph in the later chapters of Genesis. Pharaoh gave Joseph his royal seal, authenticating his leadership and authorizing him to enact governmental policy.ⁱⁱ Often throughout the Ancient Near East a king would mark an important document with the imprint of his signet ring. This was intended to authenticate the important document.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1 Corinthians 9:2 Paul says that his converts are the “seal” of his apostleship, i.e. they show that Paul really is an apostle.^{iv} Even Jesus is said to have the “seal” of the Father. This seal authenticated Jesus as the true Son of Man (John 6:27). So the first meaning of sealing is to give a *sign of authenticity*.^v

The implication for you and me is this. When you and I believe in Christ and become members of his family, God seals us by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit living within us is God’s irrevocable sign that we are really his. The Spirit is the trademark of God’s presence in our lives, indicating that we are authentic children of God.

Before moving on we need to underscore that *all* genuine believers have the seal of the Holy Spirit. How do we know this? First, we are never exhorted as believers to be sealed with the Spirit. It is something that is done to us as the point of conversion, and not something that we are to seek after following conversion. The Bible tells us to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), but never to be sealed with the Spirit. This strongly implies that the sealing of the Holy Spirit is given to all believers, irrespective of their spiritual maturity or responsiveness.

Second, Paul writes to the Corinthians that they had received the seal of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). Given the state of the Corinthian church, this is an amazing statement. This church was characterized by division, immorality, gluttony and prideful attitudes. And yet Paul says that they all had this “seal of ownership” in their hearts.^{vi} So the bottom line is this – the sealing of the Spirit is given to *all* believers. It is not a special privilege reserved for those who have reached a certain level of maturity in the Christian life. It is rather one of the primary motivations for growth in Christ: since we have been sealed, don’t grieve the very Spirit who has sealed you!

In fact, that is just what Paul says later in this letter:

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Eph 4:30-32

The doctrine of security should never breed permission to sin in the Christian life. “Oh, I am safe and secure, sealed by the Spirit; now I can live as I wish!” Paul says just the opposite. Yes, we have been “sealed for the day of redemption.” And this very fact should lead you and me to never grieve that same Holy Spirit by sins of the tongue or a lack of forgiveness.

But let’s unseal this word “seal” a little more. Not only does it imply *authenticity*, but it also speaks of *ownership*.^{vii} The fact that the Holy Spirit is our “seal” indicates that we belong to God. This seems to be the emphasis of another New Testament passage where this word is used:

He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

The city of Ephesus was well-known as a seaport where there was an extensive timber trade from the neighboring areas. When the timber was brought into port, a merchant would come, select his timber, mark it with a seal – his own signet – and claim ownership. Later, he would send his agent with the signet. This agent would identify all the timber previously marked by his superior and claim it. In a similar way, my wife experienced this on the farm where she grew up. The cattle are sealed with the mark of their owner, indicating to whom they belong.

At the point of conversion, the Holy Spirit was given to each believer as a seal, signifying *ownership*. We are no longer our own, Paul says, for we have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). No wonder Paul says in Ephesians 1: 14 “*until the redemption of those who are God's possession...*”

Authenticity. Ownership. But there is a third aspect which is probably the primary meaning of the word, i.e. *protection*. In ancient times, as well as today, articles are sealed in order to prevent others from tampering with

them. In this case, the sealing of the Holy Spirit means that we are *protected* by God.

An illustration of this in the Old Testament is found in Daniel 6:17-18. After Darius is manipulated into throwing Daniel into the lion's den, he seals it with his won signet ring:

A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Dan 6:17-18

One of the best known examples of sealing is found in the New Testament. The chief priest and Pharisees asked Pilate to secure Jesus' tomb with hopes of preventing his body from being stolen. Matthew describes it this way –

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. Matt 27:65-66

This official seal was to be broken only under penalty of death. So in both passages we see the idea of *inaccessibility* or *protection from outside influence*. An article that is sealed cannot, must not be tampered with, touched or modified. Another example is Revelation 7:3 where a seal is placed on the forehead of God's servants, protecting them from the judgment of God on the earth.

I like how Martin Luther describes this sense of security:

Among men nothing is safer and more certain than that which is given under one's hand and seal. I feel secure when I have a sealed document ... Anyone who really accepts the message of the Gospel resolutely sets his seal to it and says: "This seal and document mean that I can stake life and limb and all I possess on this." His heart is certain and harbors no doubts.^{viii}

Sealing then speaks of *protection*. Nothing can touch you and me and remove us from Christ.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither

height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8:38-39

There is nothing or no one who can break this seal other than God himself. And He has promised to never break it! When we are sealed by God, we are as secure as the very promises of God.

In summary, the sealing of the Holy Spirit *authenticates* God's ownership and *protection* of his people. The Holy Spirit does not seal us. God seals us and the Holy Spirit himself is the seal. If you seal an item in wax (as they did in New Testament times), the substance of the seal is the wax. You – the person doing the sealing – are distinct from the seal itself. In this case, God does the sealing and the Holy Spirit is himself the seal. God is the One who seals, Christ is the sphere in which the sealing takes place, and the Holy Spirit is the seal itself.

The other day I ordered something to be sent to me by registered mail. Only two people can open such an item – the sender (if it is sent back to him) and the recipient. You and I as believers have been “sent” on our way to heaven by God himself. We have been sealed for the day of redemption. We have been “registered” by the Holy Spirit who himself is the seal. But in this case, it is God who sends us on our way and God who is also the recipient on our arrival. Therefore, only God can break that seal of the Holy Spirit and he has promised not to do so.^{ix}

This idea of security in Christ is enhanced by another word that Paul uses in these verses in Ephesians. This word is found in verse 14:

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:13-14

This same idea of the Spirit as a “deposit” is also found in two other passages:

He ... put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 2 Corinthians 5:5

The word in Paul's language is *arrabōn*, meaning a "pledge" or "earnest." In New Testament days it often signified the first installment or down payment on a business transaction.^x In modern Greek the word is used for an engagement ring. But the difference is this. An engagement ring promises marriage, but it is not part of the marriage itself. In contrast, the Holy Spirit is himself the first installment of what is to come. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until we have full possession of it. The sealing secures our relationship to the Head, Christ, while the idea of "down payment" looks ahead, guaranteeing our future inheritance that is promised.

A couple of weeks ago, I purchased a used car. When I wrote that check for the down payment, I sealed the transaction, I obligated myself to follow through, and what I put down was actually part of what was to come, i.e. the rest of the payment. In the same way the Holy Spirit is the seal of God's purchase of you and me. It's like deposited money that both promises future payment in full and at the same time gives partial payment in the present. His presence in our lives indicates that God will follow through on what He has promised. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit provides an actual foretaste of what we have awaiting us in the future.

The Spirit gives us understanding in the present; that is a foretaste of everlasting insight and understanding. The Spirit makes us more like Christ in the present; that is a foretaste of perfect holiness in the future. The Spirit comforts us now; that is a pledge of perfect joy and peace once we are in God's presence.

There we have it. *God's great desire for you and me is that we feel secure in his love and protection.* And for that reason He has given us who believe his Holy Spirit who is our seal and deposit, guaranteeing that what God has begun in our lives, he will finish. All that lies behind us and all that lies before us (no matter how difficult) are tiny matters compared to what lies within us. When out on that edge, fifty stories high in an unpredictable wind, we can rest in the fact that we are secure in Christ.

Notes

ⁱ The term is used 25 times in the New Testament in the following passages: Matt. 27:66; John 3:33; 6:27; Rom 15:28; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30; Rev. 7:3-8; 10:4; 20:3; 22:10.

ⁱⁱ Genesis 41: 42-44.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eldon Woodcock, "The Seal of the Holy Spirit" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (April-June 1998): 142, 147.

^{iv} Also, in Romans 4:11 Abraham's circumcision is called the sign and "seal" of the righteousness he had by faith. In other words, circumcision authenticated the righteousness Abraham has received by faith before being circumcised.

^v Other examples of this include: 1 Kings 21:8; Esther 3:10; Nehemiah 9:38-10:1; Jeremiah 32:9-12; Romans 15:28; 1 Corinthians 9:2-3; 2 Timothy 2:19.

^{vi} This same idea is also seen later in this epistle to the Ephesians (a verse that we'll come back to a little later): *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* Eph 4:30 The sealing of the Holy Spirit is the *basis* for the exhortation not to grieve the Spirit.

^{vii} Cf. *...so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver. I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales.* Jeremiah 32:9-10.

^{viii} *Luther's Works*, quoted by Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1971), 245, n. 124.

^{ix} Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 82.

^x *BAG*, 109; cf. Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit: Activating God's Power in Your Life* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1978), 76. The businessmen of Paul's day saw a "pledge" or "earnest" as (1) a down payment sealing a transaction; (2) a sign indicating an obligation to follow through on the purchase; and (3) a sample of what was to come.