

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

A Down Payment You Can Depend On

God's great desire for you and me is that we feel safe and secure – not necessarily in *our* circumstances or relationships – but in *his* love and protection. Do you sense such safety and security in God's love?

The fact of the matter is that most of us 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:

- I need to find another place to live.
- Finals are coming up! PLEASE PRAY!
- So much to do before I move, please pray!
- Please pray for a job position change.
- I'm not sleeping well. PLEASE PRAY!
- Please pray that I will have the right blood pressure medicine.
- Pray for a friend who just experienced a stroke.

And the list goes on and on. There's 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 high in an unpredictable wind. (There may be a few rare ones here who like that feeling!)

Can you relate? 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 know how you feel. There have been times when I thought I was going over the edge. But you know what? That doesn't really matter. What matters is that Jesus knows how you feel. And more than that, he desires that you experience his love and protection...even when your circumstances and relationships are everything but safe and secure.

But how? *How* can you and I feel secure in his love and protection? Well, that's where the teaching of the Holy Spirit comes in. But it is also here – the person and work of the Holy Spirit – that we are often lacking in our understanding and appreciation. Ray Stedman has said this:

Wherever the Christian church is weak (and it is weak in many places), and wherever Christians are weak individually, *it is always because they have never graduated into the high school of the Holy Spirit* – they are still babes in Christ, no matter how long they have been Christians.¹

Some believers are still stuck in Romans 3 (salvation) and have never “graduated” into Romans 8 (Spirit). This morning we are going to explore several truths that will help us “graduate into the high school of the Holy Spirit”...and in so doing, feel secure in God's love and protection.

The Spirit as Witness

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Romans 8:15-16

The Bible says that when you and I believe in Christ, we are baptized by the Spirit into Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). At that moment we receive whom Paul calls here the “Spirit of sonship” or, as some translations say, “the Spirit of adoption.”

This Spirit of adoption, Paul says, gives you and me a new confidence and security in life. We are no longer controlled by *fear* – in our circumstances and relationships – but by *faith*. Because of the Spirit of God who lives in us, we can confidently come to God in the most tragic of circumstances and cry “*Abba, Father.*”

Originally, the term *Abba* – Aramaic for “Daddy” – was an endearing term used by young Aramaic speaking children in reference to their father. It speaks of the uniqueness, trust and intimacy that characterize the relationship. As a parent, I love to hear that expression: “Daddy.” I keep on my dresser at home a picture of our oldest son (now in heaven) with a small block of wood he once gave me and on which he had engraved these words, “Dad, I love you.” I love to hear that, particularly from my adult children. But by the time of Jesus the expression was no longer restricted to the speech of children. Jesus himself uses the term in the Garden of Gethsemane in reference to his Heavenly Father. In his intense suffering he cries “*Abba, Father ... not what I will, but what you will*” (Mark 14:36).

How does the Holy Spirit testify to our spirit? By leading us in the trying circumstances of our lives to confidently cry out to God, “Daddy, Daddy.” Such childlike trust, such intimacy with the Father, such abandon to God’s will in the tough stuff of life is a sure sign that the Spirit of God lives in you.

God’s great desire for you and me is that we feel secure—not necessarily in *our* circumstances and relationships -- but in *his* love and protection. And He has given us the witness of the Holy Spirit for that purpose.

The Spirit as Seal

But there is more. Not only do we have the *witness* of the Spirit. We have the *seal* of the Spirit.ⁱⁱ

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... Ephesians 1:13

What does it mean to be marked with the sealⁱⁱⁱ of the Holy Spirit? 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 that document.^{iv} 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. 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 In other words, if you have the seal, then you're for real! [Can you say that with me? "If you have the seal, then you're for real!"]

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 that cries out "Abba, Father" 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.

But let's unseal this word "seal" a little more. Not only does it imply *authenticity*, but it also speaks of *ownership*.^{vi} The fact that the Holy Spirit is our "seal" indicates that we *belong* to God.

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. My wife experienced this on the farm where she grew up. Except there it wasn't timber, but cattle. The cattle are sealed with the mark of their owner, indicating to whom they belong.

In a similar way, God has marked all who believe with his "signet seal," identifying us as His most "precious possession" (Deuteronomy 32:10).^{vii}

That seal *is* the Holy Spirit. And one day, he is going to send his personal agent, Jesus Christ, to claim us and bring us home.^{viii}

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. Men, when was the last time your wife called you into the kitchen to demonstrate your manliness by opening the sealed jar of preserves? In this case, the sealing of the Holy Spirit means that we are *protected* by God.

Remember Daniel in the Old Testament, that prophet who was thrown in the lion's den? The biblical account says this:

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.*
Daniel 6:17-18

Sealing then speaks of *protection*. Nothing can touch you and me and remove us from Christ. Just like Daniel, our situation cannot change! Fortunately, we're not sealed in a lion's den, but we're sealed "in Christ."^{ix}

And so Paul asks the question in Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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.

When we are sealed by God, we are as secure as the very promises of God.^x

In summary, the sealing of the Holy Spirit *authenticates* God's *ownership* and *protection* of his people.^{xi} Have you ever sent something 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.^{xii}

God's great desire for you and me is that we feel secure—not necessarily in *our* circumstances and relationships -- but in *his* love and protection. And He has given us the seal of the Holy Spirit for that purpose.

The Spirit as Down Payment

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 witness and sealing of the Spirit look *up*, securing our relationship to the Head, Christ. But the down payment of the Spirit looks *ahead*, guaranteeing our future inheritance that is promised. 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.^{xiii} In modern Greek the word is used for an engagement ring.^{xiv}

Last year, 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 first installment of God's purchase of you and me. It's like deposited money that provides partial payment in the present and promises full payment in the future.

As believers, we experience partially in the present what we will experience fully in the future. This is what is sometimes called the tension of the “already / but not yet.” We “already” experience partially what we “not yet” know fully. We are “heavenly radicals” (as Gordon Fee calls us) who live in the beginning of the end.

Over this past week there was a lot of “hype” about June 6, 2006 (666). The phone rang in my office on Tuesday afternoon. It was KATU News. The question was: Is this date important to you? I thought, “Well, my daughter just arrived home from Greece! That’s pretty important.” “No, I mean the date...you know, 666 (June 6, 2006),” the person said. Well, June 6, 2006 came and went without anything of biblical proportions taking place.

There’s a lot of talk these days about the end times, as seen in the recently released movie, “The Omen.” But the Bible says that we’ve been living in the end times ever since the first coming of Jesus Christ. Paul writes to the Corinthians “...for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). Remember what I’ve said before? Up until the time of Christ, all of history was headed in one direction. But then, with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, history took an abrupt turn. It is as if we are now walking along a precipice called the “end times.” At any moment, we could move over the edge into the “age to come.”

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit provides an actual foretaste of what we have awaiting us in the future. As believers, we experience *partially* in the present what we will experience *fully* in the future. The Spirit gives us understanding in the present; that is a foretaste of everlasting insight and understanding when we “move over the edge” into the age to come. The Spirit makes us more like Christ in the present; that is a foretaste of the perfect holiness when we “move over the edge” into the age to come. The Spirit comforts us now; that is a pledge of the perfect joy and peace when we “move over the edge” into the age to come.

The Spirit as Firstfruits

There is another verse in Romans 8 that speaks of the Spirit’s pledge that one day we will “move over the edge” into the age to come. It’s found in Romans 8:23.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies For in this hope we were saved. Romans 8:23

All the “hype” of this world can in no way be compared to the hope of the Gospel. And hope in the Bible is often pictured under the image of “firstfruits.” In the Old Testament, the first sheaf of grain was the pledge of the final harvest. And in the New Testament, Christ’s resurrection is the pledge of your resurrection. And the very fact that the Holy Spirit who powerfully worked to raise Christ from the dead lives in you, the believer, is the sure sign that you too will be raised one day to life everlasting. And this hope is called here the “firstfruits” of the Spirit.

In the present, we “groan inwardly.” Not only does all of creation groan under the devastating effects of sin, but we also groan. And Paul tells us why. It is because we have the “firstfruits of the Spirit.” And it is precisely *because* we have the Holy Spirit living within us, and have “tasted” of the world to come, that we “groan inwardly” seeing the effects of sin both in and

around us. Rather paradoxically, we groan *because* we have the Spirit. We sense as never before all that God wants us to be and all that we one day will be and how far we fall short! In this sense, our frustration is increased!!

But in the present, we also “wait eagerly.” The one word translated “wait eagerly” carries the idea of “stretching the neck” or “leaning forward, into” with anticipation to see what lies ahead. And that should be our constant stance as Christians. We live in the “already/but not yet.” We should daily take hold of all that we *already* have in Christ, so freely given by the Holy Spirit who lives in us. But we should also constantly “lean into” the “not yet,” eagerly anticipating the age to come when we will experience fully what now we only experience partially.

Isn't it 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. And Paul makes this very clear in Romans 8. When you swore allegiance to Jesus Christ, you signed up for the most dangerous mission in the world. After all, wasn't this the experience of our captain and chief? In that garden, facing the awful powers of hell itself, Jesus cries out “Abba, Father.” 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—not necessarily in our circumstances and relationships -- but in *his* love and protection.

And for that reason He has given us who believe his Holy Spirit who is our witness, our seal, our down payment and our firstfruits, 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, you can know the safety and protection of God's love.

ⁱ Ray Stedman, Sermon on Romans 5:1-11 “Faith Faces Life” 6/10/62

ⁱⁱ This image is used in three New Testament passages: 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30.

ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

^{iv} Eldon Woodcock, “The Seal of the Holy Spirit” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (April-June 1998): 142, 147. 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 In Genesis 41: 42-44 Pharaoh gave Joseph his royal seal, authenticating his leadership and authorizing him to enact governmental policy. Other examples of a seal indicating authenticity are found in 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} 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.

^{vii} “He surrounded them and watched over them; he guarded them as his most precious possession.” Deuteronomy 32:10 NLT.

^{viii} This idea of ownership seems to be the emphasis of another New Testament passage where this word is used: “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his *seal* [NIV adds “of ownership”] on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” 2 Corinthians 1:21-22. 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*...”

^{ix} Cf. 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

^x No wonder Jesus says: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; *no one can snatch them out of my hand*. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; *no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand*.” John 10:27-29

^{xi} 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.

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

^{xiii} *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.

^{xiv} 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.